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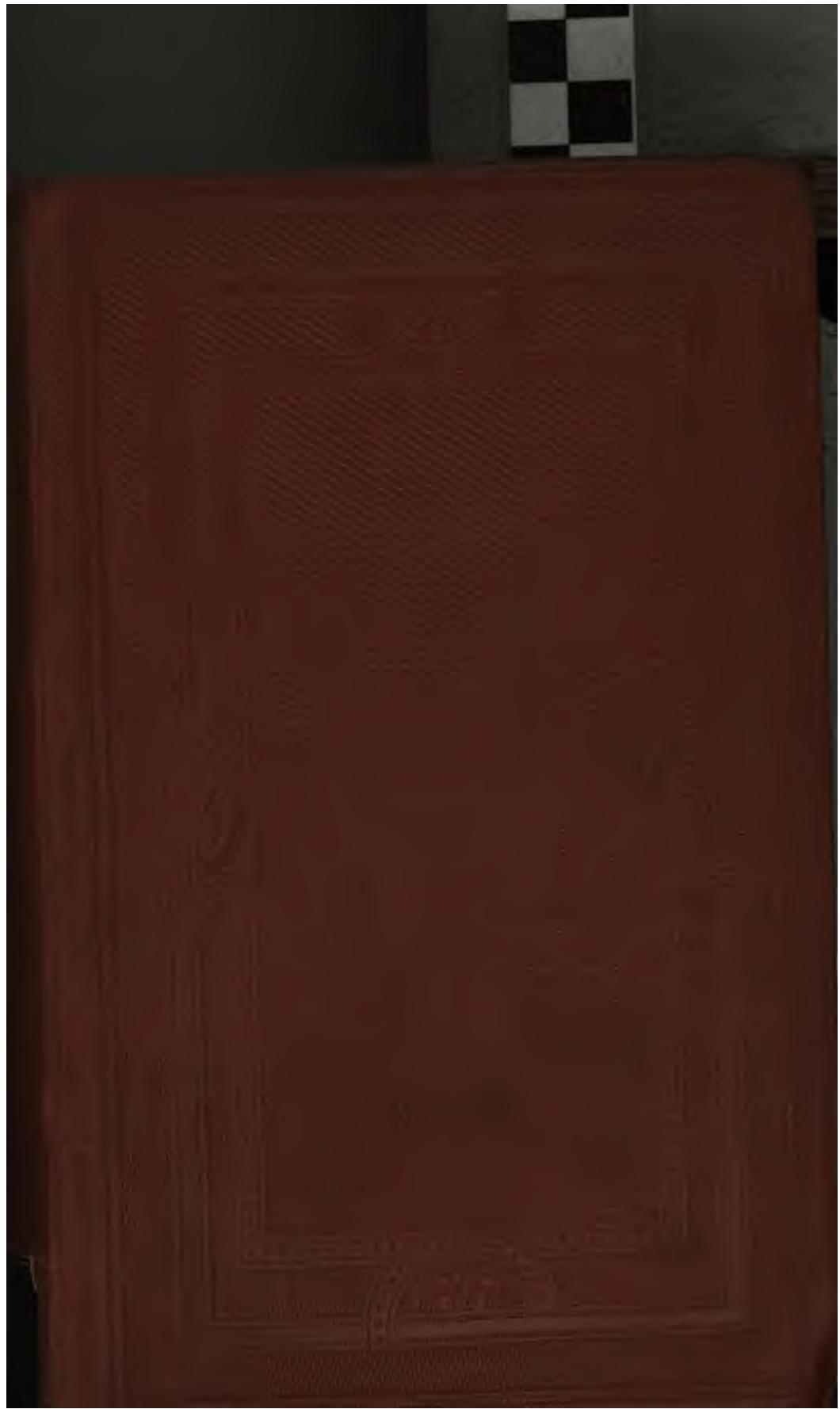
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POPLAR HOUSE ACADEMY.

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BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

" In every village, marked with little spire,
Embowered in trees, and hardly known to fame,
There dwells, in lowly shade and mean attire,
A matron old, whom we schoolmistress name."

SHENSTONE.

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POPLAR HOUSE ACADEMY.

CHAPTER I.

Somewhat back from the village street
Stands the old-fashioned country-seat;
Across its antique portico
Tall poplar trees their shadows throw;
And, from its station in the hall,
An antique time-piece says to all,
‘For ever! never!
Never! for ever!’

LONGFELLOW: *The Old Clock on the Stairs.*

HOW well I remember that evening! My two sisters sat looking into the fire, and I could see that Jacintha's heart was swelling; while tears silently rolled down Marian's cheeks.

“Yes, I suppose that must be it,” said Jacintha reluctantly at last. “We need not have troubled ourselves to consider whether we could consent to receive my father's protection, since he has placed us beyond the pale of it.”

“And thereby relieved us of a difficulty,” said I; suggesting a comfort that I felt was a very poor one.

“The only thing is the disgrace,” said Jacintha, knitting her brow a little.

“Oh, there's the *sin*!” ejaculated poor Marian; and tears at the same moment streamed

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so fast from her eyes, that ours sympathetically burst forth.

“This won’t do—” said Jacintha at last, after crying very heartily.

“Any good,” added I, as if she had not finished her sentence. “No, that’s quite certain. Come, let us all cheer up a little.”

“How can we?” said Marian, trying to smile, and lapsing into tears again.

“Marian, you’re eighteen. Jacintha and I are old women in comparison. Indeed, *I* am an old maid *really*, and have been ever since I was born; and Jacintha will be, if she lives to be old enough.”

“Well, what then?”

“What then? Why, Jacintha and I not being quite so young and tender as you, do not feel things quite so keenly—though we do feel them bitterly, too.”

“That’s one comfort—I mean it is a comfort that you don’t feel them so keenly,” said Marian, drying her eyes; “because I know very well that I do feel things too much, and I will cure myself if I can, and when I can—only I can’t do it all at once”—with a sweet, April smile.

“Of course you can’t. But, as I’m the eldest, you know it is my province to preach a little. Now, let us all compose ourselves, and have tea comfortably, and then talk over what is to be done.”

“Oh, let us talk over what is to be done *first*, and have tea afterwards, please,” said Marian.

“Yes, I’m for that, too,” said Jacintha, “unless Isabella particularly wishes for tea.”

"Oh no," said I, "I can wait—" (though I *should* have liked it.) "Well then, now for it:—Here are we three spinsters, bereaved of our dear mother by death, and of our father by his suddenly quitting the kingdom with every penny he can lay his hands on—leaving us with nothing—"

"Except his debts," said Jacintha.

"No, we are not liable to them:—except this house, I was going to say, which, luckily, was settled on my mother and her children—and fifty pounds a year each."

"On which we must starve," said Jacintha.

"Unless we do something," said I.

"Which of course we shall!" cried Marian. "I'm ready, for one. Let me be the first! I'll go out as governess, and then you two will have time to look about you and let the house. Dear old house!" said she, looking wistfully round.

"Marian, what nonsense!" cried Jacintha. "I shall be the one to go out first; you're too young—who would have such a chit?"

"I know I could not command such a salary as you could," said Marian, meekly.

"No, certainly you couldn't, though you are twice as clever as I am, and much better read, and more popular with children—"

"Oh, Jacintha! how *can* you say so? You are all that, and more! I know very well I'm not equal to you; still, I might do something, and we can but do our best, you know—"

"There's only one thing, Marian, in which I am your superior—and that is, in age. I'm ten years older, and shall therefore fetch ten

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or perhaps twenty guineas more per annum in the governessing market."

"Well, I hope you may, I am sure, Jacintha, for it will not be more than you are worth; and whatever I get, I shall be satisfied with, if it is enough to keep me from encumbering you; though, of course, I shall be very glad if I can spare a little for Isabella."

"You seem both consigning me to very inglorious inactivity!" said I. "Pray, what am *I* to do?"

"Oh, you are not strong enough to do anything," said Marian. "You must live on the hundred and fifty pounds a year, if you can."

"But *I can't*. What! live upon your and Jacintha's little incomes, as well as my own? No, Marian! I'll never do that."

"Nonsense," interposed Jacintha, "*you* must not go out. You must be crazy to think of it."

"I will not go out, if you and Marian will not."

"Why, what else can we do?"

"Keep a school."

"A school! Oh, horrible!" exclaimed Jacintha.

There was a pause.

"I was afraid you would think so," at length said I rather apologetically. "The only thing is, we need not then separate."

"Oh, horrid!" repeated Jacintha. "What! a school in this dear old house? What desecration!"

"Suppose the tenant to whom we let it, applies it to that purpose?"

"Oh, we must provide against that in the covenant of the lease."

After another pause, Marian remarked, "I wonder what John would think."

"I'm sure he would not like it," said Jacintha, shortly.

Another pause; again broken by Marian, who observed, "It certainly would be very nice for us all to keep together."

"So it would!" exclaimed Jacintha, with one of those revulsions of feeling which she sometimes exhibited. "Oh! I see it must be! I'll give in! We *will* keep a school!"

She had, I believe, been hastily turning over in her mind every hope of escape from it, without finding one, and therefore sensibly struck her colours.

"That's settled, then!" cried Marian, gladly. "And I have a presentiment we shall succeed, and like it very much indeed."

"Then now we'll have tea," said I, ringing for it as I spoke. At the same moment, the tinkle of a muffin-bell was heard in the street.

I have an affection for the muffin-bell. I inherit it from my mother, who used to say it always called up in her imagination pictures of tradesmen's snug little tea-tables, in small back-parlours behind the shop, where a bright kettle was singing on the hob, and a sleek cat sleeping on the clean hearth.

"Come, we'll have some muffins," said I munificently, as Hawkins spread the table-cover.

"Don't launch into extravagances already, Isabella," said Jacintha; "it will do us much

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more good to begin self-denial. I don't care for muffins."

"Then where's the self-denial?" said I, laughing. "I do, and so does Marian, I know. Here's a sixpence, Hawkins, to invest for us in muffins and crumpets. See that you make a good bargain."

"Isabella reminds me of Moore's lines," said Marian, humming them playfully, not sentimentally—

" 'Come, chase that starting tear away,
Ere mine to meet it springs!
To-night, at least to-night be gay,
Whate'er to-morrow brings!'"

"*Ergo*, eat muffins, and put an extra spoonful of tea into the teapot," said I, laughing, as Marian proceeded to measure the tea, not with a spoon, but a little silver shell, out of a small silver caddy, engraved, not embossed, and worn exceeding thin by the plate-leathers of three generations.

I observed Hawkins give a puzzled, half-peevish, half-pleased look, as she took the money, and eyed us one after the other.

"Well, Hawkins, what is it?" said I.

"Oh, there, I'm glad to see your spirits mending," said she, with a little jerk of the chin; "but, sure enough, I *do* wonder sometimes what the ladies is laughing at!"

"One of the Miss Middlemasses' wonderful jokes, you dull old Hawkins!" said Marian, with a pat on her shoulder.

"The *Misses* Middlemass," said I.

"Oh no, for pity's sake, no!" cried Jacintha.

"Rather, set grammar at defiance—such a blue-board academy phrase! 'Seminary for young ladies, by the Misses Middlemass.'—Horrible!"

"Suppose we ignore seminaries and academies, and prohibit the words horrible and horrid till after tea," said I: "otherwise, I must say, 'Miss Marian, pass the mark!'"

We all laughed.

"Another of 'the ladies' queer jokes,' Hawkins will think," said Marian, merrily. "Poor old soul! she can't imagine what we find in them to laugh at, nor how we can laugh at all."

"Family jokes," said Jacintha. "Few out of the magic circle can see the point of them."

"They are excellent things, though," said I: "a good stock in hand of familiar, harmless mirth."

"Dear me, how people will open their eyes when they hear what we are going to do!" said Jacintha.

"If they do nothing worse than that, we need not mind it much," said I.

"Worse? I hope and expect they'll do 'a deal better,' as Hawkins says!" cried Marian. "Opening their eyes would not get us any pupils: I expect them to open their ears, and hearts, and purses. Depend on it, we shall soon be obliged to say 'a limited number only is taken!'"

"Ah, that's a professional fiction," said Jacintha. "Schoolmasters and schoolmistresses generally limit themselves to as many as they can get."

"Or their houses can hold," suggested I.

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“Only bachelors’ houses are elastic. Come, Marian, dispense the herb that cheers but not inebriates. Here come the muffins.”

“The idea!” presently exclaimed Jacintha; “the idea that pupils will pour in! How do we know we shall get even one? I dare say we shall not.”

“One would be worse than none,” said I; “for there would be all the routine, with very little return.”

“On the contrary, *I* should very gladly begin with only one,” said Marian; “and rather prefer it, because it would be some one to practice on, before we committed any blunders on a magnified scale. What ought the routine to be, I wonder?”

We were all profoundly ignorant. Not one of us had ever been at school. My mother had educated me, with the assistance of masters; and I, with the assistance of masters, had educated my sisters.

“Oh, we shall soon arrange all that,” said Jacintha; “I have not the least fear of anything of that kind.”

“Nor I, with two so clever as Isabella and you to arrange it,” said Marian; “I only thought you could give me some little notion.”

“We’ll put it all down on paper after tea,” said I; “that will be the only way.”

“Yes; because we really must have something definite before us,” said Marian. “I suppose we must have a French and English teacher.”

“Dear me, no.” }

“Dear me, yes.” }

Said I and Jacintha at the same moment.

“*No!*” repeated Jacintha, with surprise.

“Well, I have a prejudice against French teachers,” said I. “I confess, I fancy them all profligate and treacherous, and too much for us simple unsophisticated bodies. They would get flirting with the dancing-master, or reading French novels in bed; or—there’s no knowing what they might not do. I am sure it would disturb my rest at night.”

“But, my dear Isabella—!”

“But, my dear Jacintha, we shall do perfectly well without one. Good old Monsieur Hébert gave you an excellent French accent; and, besides, who wants to speak French like a native, in this place? Let us limit our undertakings to our capabilities: teach what we know to as many as we can teach, and no more: then, all the profits will be ours, instead of being cut up by having to pay salaries.”

“Surely that is a sensible idea!” cried Marian appealingly to Jacintha, who looked dubious. “Yes, yes; you shall teach French and take the general superintendence; Isabella will keep house, receive visitors, and have a class in the parlour for composition and Italian, and sit by when the music and drawing masters come; and I will take the general drudgery that any one not an idiot may fearlessly undertake—reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar—”

“Marian, Marian!” interposed Jacintha.

“And use of the globes!” added Marian, laughingly. “A school would not be a school without that!”

A pause ensued.

“What is Isabella thinking of?” said Marian, softly.

“Why,” said I, with a little hesitation, “I don’t like seeing any defect in my own scheme; but—”

“But what?”

“If this is carried out, I fear that Jacintha and you will never marry.”

“Oh, pray don’t let that trouble you!” said Jacintha, reining up her head.

“No, it really should not,” pursued Marian earnestly; “because, what has prevented our marrying hitherto, if any suitable persons had wanted to marry us? You know very well, Isabella, such persons do not abound here, or *you* would not have remained single, unless by your own choice; and as for Jacintha,—when some one worthy of her, and whom *she* can consent to admit to be so, shall appear, never fear his making his way to her, whether we keep a school or not!”

“The simplicity of the child!” said Jacintha, looking across to me, with a smile and a sigh.

“Child! I’m eighteen!” cried Marian. “And as steady as old Time! Please don’t lower my dignity, Jacintha, or it will be impossible for me to inspire respect.”

“From the one pupil! Oh dear, no! I won’t lower your dignity.”

“What will be the first step you shall take, Isabella?”

“I rather think I shall call upon Mrs. Meade.”

"Mrs. Meade? What can *she* know about school-keeping?" cried Jacintha.

"Not much more than she does about almost everything else, probably," said I; "but there is hardly a subject on which she cannot say something to the purpose. Besides, she is a good sympathizer, which is always a comfort; and perhaps she may even get us a pupil."

"*She?*"

"Yes. Do not recoil too impatiently from any opening. Afterwards, I think I shall call upon Mrs. Cole."

"Oh, Isabella!"

"I know her to be no favourite of yours, nor is she of mine; but you must remember she is a retired schoolmistress—"

"True! this is the first time I ever forgot it," said Jacintha.

"And may have valuable information to impart."

"Depend on it she won't give it you!"

"Well, we shall see. Why should I depend on it before I have tried?"

"Oh, if you like to," said Jacintha, with distaste.

"What do *you* mean to do?" said I. "I think it will be a very good plan for us each to do whatever we can, to-morrow, according to our several judgments."

"Then I shall call on Mrs. Forsyth," said Jacintha, with decision.

"I don't think much good is likely to accrue from that," said I.

"No more than I think there is any good in

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your calling on Mrs. Cole," retorted Jacintha.

"We each have our cronies," observed Marian.

"Crony is hardly a suitable word for a Mrs. Forsyth," said Jacintha.

"I shall call on Mrs. Christmas," said Marian.

"Marian!"

"I shall! We each have our cronies." And again, old Hawkins, as she entered to clear the table, was cheered with that sweet, silvery laugh.

"Another of the Miss Middlemasses' funny jokes, Hawkins."

"Dear ladies, I hopes the muffins was to your mind."

"Quite, thank you: I feel all the better for them; and so, I dare say, do my sisters, for they could not touch their dinner."

"Ah, that is why you thought of the muffins," said Jacintha. "Well, it really was kind of you."

When candles were lit and the table cleared, Marian set to work with writing materials, to sketch out her crude ideas of cards, circulars, and "the daily routine."

"I wonder," said she, after having been thus employed for some time, "I wonder what John will think of it."

"Time enough for him to know when all is settled," said Jacintha.

I believe we each had our misgivings on the subject.

CHAPTER II.

A husbandman, whose three sons were not always on the best terms, one day pointed to a fagot, and desired each of them in turn to try to break it. After they had all failed, he directed them to untie it, and then try to snap each stick separately ; which they did with ease. Then said the old man, "Thus you, my children, as long as you remain united, are a match for all your enemies ; but, differ and separate, and you are all undone!"—*Æsop's Fables.*

IT appears to me that the Middlemasses have always thought sufficiently well of themselves. By this I may be understood to imply that we have thought rather more of ourselves than there was, perhaps, any absolute occasion for. Thus, we were not of the lower ranks, but were not high born ; and yet we thought and talked a good deal of "the family," though we knew nothing of it beyond our grandfather —a plain, honest man. Also, we were apt to think we had sustained heavy losses, and been reduced from great affluence ; whereas our means had never been more than moderate, though extremely comfortable, till my father's expensive courses began. Again, we regarded our domestic misfortunes as remarkably hard and worthy of a very extraordinary amount of sympathy from our friends ; whereas I now incline to believe that hundreds and thousands of families of the middle class might have been

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found at any time, in any part of the United Kingdoms, who would have thought their lot vastly bettered indeed, had it been no more aggravated than ours. However, fortunately for us, there was a sincerity in our representations of our affairs, which completely won over the majority of our acquaintance to view them precisely as we did. We were very much pitied and condoled with, and great allowances were made for us, and a great deal of interest and curiosity elicited about what we should do and how we should do it; though, after all, perhaps, we may have occupied far less of their thoughts in this way than we supposed.

Our maternal grandfather and grandmother were a worthy couple of the name of Edmonstone. They lived in the small but cheerful country town of Bayford, in the very house we now occupied. From this house my mother married; in this house, my aunt Christy continued to minister to her parents till they dropped off; to this house, we Middlemass girls used to be uncommonly glad to pay long visits, whether in winter or summer, to grandpapa and grandmamma, till such time as we got dreadfully home-sick, and privately sent a line to mamma to beg to be recalled. These visits afforded us our only glimpses of the country; for our father, who was a busy man in the city, contented himself with renting a good family house, neither in nor out of town, and never sent us to the sea-side. We used to be very happy during the early part of our lives: the first half of the day was engaged in lessons, under my mother's superintendence;

then came walking, a visit or two to pay or receive, and my father's return in the evening. This was always the signal for cheerfulness ; he used to come home for relaxation, and liked to see my mother nicely dressed and everything in apple-pie order for him. When we were too young to dine late, they generally dined by themselves ; but my mother was one of those who, while practising a genteel economy, always knew how to give a genial air to a meal, though it were but a cold joint of mutton. The plate would be bright, the vegetables delicately dressed, proper condiments at hand, and a pudding, devised or perhaps made by herself, would crown the feast. She would not buy salmon at three shillings a pound, but she did not grudge sixteen-pence ; she would not give half-a-crown for a peach, but would have the freshest, ripest of strawberries and cherries in their season. My father was a tall, strikingly handsome man, though his hair was as white as snow. He always brought home the news of the day, which my mother enjoyed hearing him retail, for she had no leisure hours to waste in the morning over the *Times* ; and, as he came out with one scrap of information after another, over his wine and walnuts, it is surprising to think to what account she could turn it.

“ ‘ Hurricane at the Caraccas :’ Marian, where are the Caraccas ? Turn to the atlas, dear. ‘ An opera by Bononcini is going to be revived :’ Isabella, I forget about Bononcini—was not he a rival of Handel’s ? ‘ Some new discoveries made at Pompeii :’ by the by,

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Jacintha, you can tell us, I fancy, when Pompeii was overwhelmed?"

Yes, those were pleasant days. John (the only boy among us, born after me and before Jacintha) was at Merchant Taylors' School; but we had enough of him, if not rather too much, in the holidays; and sometimes we were very glad when he went down to finish them off with grandpapa and grandmamma Edmonstone.

We were glad when he went there, but we were still more glad to go ourselves. Oh, how joyful we were, when my mother or my father accompanied one or two of us to the coach-office in Bishopgate Street, saw us safely ensconced inside the old stage-coach, and our small box safely stowed on the roof, under the tarpaulin, and then charged us with messages and advice, and smiled and nodded to the last! How we could hardly sit still with delight and impatience to be off, unless there were five other insides, or one or two cross enough for five; which subdued us very much. But it was generally my luck to travel with some nice old gentleman; it occurred so often that at last I used quite to look out for him, and be disappointed if he did not appear. He and I generally got very cordial towards the end of the journey, and he learnt a good deal more of my history than I did of his. We used to know all the pretty wayside inns where the horses would be changed; and, just as day was closing, whether in a glare of midsummer sunshine or shrouded in December gloom, we would dash up to "The White Hart," Bayford, and see our upright, white-headed, brisk-looking old grand-

father standing just under the porch beside the innkeeper, ready to receive us and carry us home.

That home was at the end of the town—at the end of the principal street, just where it began to fall off into fields and gardeners'-grounds—and at the end of a long narrow front garden with a double avenue of fine poplars, a carriage sweep, and a long, oval grass-plat. Five or six wide shallow steps led up to the house-door, which had a handsome, heavily carved architrave, almost as cumbrous as a pulpit sounding-board, and opened into a square hall, paved with black and white marble in diamonds or lozenges.

The ceiling was painted in uncommonly vivid oil colours, by a free, masterly hand, with sprawling goddesses and cupids embedded in clouds. The staircase was double, forming several right-angles, and of carved oak. On the right hand was the drawing-room, with its carved ceiling, cornice, and high mantelpiece; on the left, the long, narrow dining-room, with its strait-backed chairs worked in Turk-stitch. Both these apartments had smaller rooms beyond, and there was another sitting-room behind the drawing-room, appropriated to my grandfather's use. Upstairs were numerous bedrooms and dressing-rooms, on various levels; on the basement, excellent servants' offices. Coach-house and stables on one side the house; good kitchen-garden, bowling-green, and formally laid out flower-garden behind.

Such was the house to which we delighted to repair; capering up the steps to greet my

grandmother and aunt, with broad smiles and impetuous kisses. Sometimes Jacintha and I were sent together ; sometimes, I was allowed to undertake the charge of the more timid Marian, and, in earlier times, I often went by myself ; but latterly, when my dear mother required more of my care, I was the one who went least frequently.

Behold us proceeding in procession to the bedroom with clean white dimity furniture, that had been duly prepared for us : grandmamma, in her voluminous habiliments, sailing before us ; aunt Christy, who is short, fat, and rosy, with an arm round our waists, and Hawkins, who was then only beginning to be rather an old-maidish parlour-maid, carrying the boxes, while grandpapa stood at the hall-door rummaging out sixpence for the porter. What an immensity we had to tell about papa, mamma, and ourselves ! How very little leisure we found for asking questions ! How aunt Christy would laugh at our talking ourselves out of breath !—how grandmamma, never satiated, would enjoy it all ; and how tardily we at length went down to dinner !

Then there was grandpapa to begin with again. There was little done but talking the first evening. Perhaps a song might be sung —a piece of fancy-work produced and criticized, but very few stitches were taken. Dear me ! it seems but yesterday. We got dreadfully sleepy at last, being a good deal shaken by the journey ; and grandmamma would bring out rich seed-cake, and plum-cake, and biscuits for supper ; and we secretly felt we could

have eaten them all and more—we were so hungry!

No danger of lying awake that night!—in sheets dried on a sweetbriar hedge, and laid in lavender, on a bed soft as down. People enjoyed soft beds in those days: now they are accustomed to prefer hard ones. For my part, I used to think it quite enchanting to sink (at Christmas) into a mass of feathers that all but closed over me, and lie blinking at the unusual luxury of a wood-fire smouldering on the hearth. My mother had the impression that my grandmother used to let her spare beds get damp: however, they never materially hurt any of us, though we certainly often had tremendously bad colds. But grandmamma always said we caught them on the journey, and told us how dangerous it was to let down the coach-window.

Then, the next morning grandpapa would say, “Come, young ladies, it will do you no harm to take three runs round the garden with me before breakfast,” and start off in advance, clapping his arms across the chest. Then, when we came panting into the breakfast-room, grandmamma would say, “Bless the girls! what colours!” and nudge my aunt to look at us. Continually during breakfast-time, she would ejaculate, “How they have shot up, to be sure! Well, time slips away;” and, directly after breakfast, my grandfather would brush up his hat, tell us to put on our bonnets (*bunnets* he always called them), clip us under his arm, and trot off to exhibit us to Mrs. Cole, or Mrs. Leftwych, or Mrs. Price. Everybody

knew and respected my grandfather: it was not that he was rich; it was not that he was eminent or powerful in any one direction, except in the way of manner and character. The first was charming; the latter, first-rate. Kissing his hand, or nodding, or gracefully bowing, or gaily smiling, to one and another as he passed along the street, many were the friendly though transient feelings he awakened. "Mr. Price, good day to you. This is my grand-daughter, sir!"

"Indeed! Upon my word, sir, she seems a very nice young lady."

This used to make us feel rather foolish, and wish grandpapa would move on; while he, quite unaware of our self-consciousness, would linger to have a few more words with Mr. Price on affairs social and domestic.

This worthy couple are now dead: nay, they had long been dead when I and my sisters sat in their old places revolving the scheme of opening a school. As Jacintha and I advanced in womanhood, affairs became less pleasant at home: my father became too much of a stranger in it. A cloud fell over the house; it could not be altogether concealed from grandpapa and grandmamma, who became very unhappy about it: then there was a great deal of letter-writing; too much of it, I often thought; and yet, how could consolation be sought or sympathy expressed but by letter? No, we had great need to be thankful for the general post; and were so in our hearts. I am sure I used to watch for the postman turning the corner, and could settle to nothing

till I saw him ; and then, if he had nothing for us, and went by, I sometimes turned quite faint. Occasionally he used to catch my eye, many doors off, and shake his head.

My grandfather's and grandmother's chief resource for us was having us down to stay with them. But union is strength, and we did not much like to divide. My mother's post was clearly at home ; I was much needed by her ; and as for Jacintha and Marian, they became wretched if they were long absent from us. However, we did go to Bayford each in turn, too : they were getting in years, and we felt it was due to such kind relatives and protectors. Besides, we really liked being with them, though each enjoyed herself in a different way.

Grandmamma and grandpapa—I smile while I write it—had the notion that I was a very superior woman : they told people so ; I have overheard them whisper it, and say I was very clever indeed, quite a genius ; it was a pity everybody did not know it ; nobody would guess what was in me, I was so retiring ; and the dearest girl ! so fond of home, &c. &c. &c. It was a sad reflection to poor grandmamma that your very superior people are often mightily behindhand in very commonplace acquirements, and her grand aim was to endue me with such a measure of these as that I should be quite perfection. Consequently, there was nothing she liked better than to be closeted with me in a little sanctum of her own, where were sugar and spice and all that's nice, and to say, “ Isabel, my dear, there is nothing in what I

am going to show you that the most delicate lady may not do without even soiling her fingers, if she be but commonly careful ; ” and then proceed to initiate me into the mysteries of a ratifia pudding, or hunter’s pudding, or cheesecake, or a Chantilly basket ; Hawkins having to trot up and down all the while with plates, cups, spoons, eggs, milk, cream, and undergo to the full as much trouble as if she had made the article outright.

Jacintha was more Aunt Christy’s companion. Both of them were rather fond of dress and parties ; and Aunt Christy, who was conscious, perhaps, of not being very much in request herself, except for better qualities than those that mainly embellish evening parties, was pleased to take out with her a niece so handsome and agreeable as Jacintha, gifted with a beautiful and cultivated voice.

Marian had ways of her own for amusing herself there. There were certain very secret and mysterious essays in authorship, original design, and musical composition, that she could carry out nowhere so free from molestation as in the dear old house. Marian could have been a first-rate genius in almost every department, had her capabilities been properly cultivated. And as it was, the creative, inventive faculty, was continually manifesting itself, and breaking out in various little attempts, that sometimes won the admiration, sometimes the laughter, of the domestic hearth ; at which she was, in the one case, innocently elated, in the other, rather sore. But her mortification always found an outlet in some

funny speech ; for Marian *could* not be pettish or ill-tempered. As for music, she would really improvise grandly, when she thought nobody within hearing, which my mother and I have sometimes wickedly contrived to be. But, if asked or desired to improvise in our presence, she would say, "Oh, very well," and after a grand crash on the keys, sing off an extempore travestie of the most amusing description, of one of Jacintha's fine Italian bravuras,—"*Ombra adorata*," for instance,—till my mother and I were in fits of laughter, and Jacintha would start up and give her a good shaking. Before company Marian's acquirements were shut up as closely as a rose-bud unblown. She would not launch out in this way even to John, though both he and my father appreciated musical genius. These little snatches of country life revived us, even after my dear grandfather and grandmother were dead, and poor Aunt Christy was very glad of a companion. She did not *depend* on one, however, but bustled on manfully by herself, coming up to town once or twice a year.

Suddenly she sickened, and was carried off by a malady that must have been of long standing, though the sturdy little woman had never succumbed, nor made mention of it. Poor Aunt Christy !

Then the Poplar House came to my mother, and after her death, to her daughters. My father was glad to send us all down to it ; change of air for my mother was the plea ; and

certainly, if any air or any place could have restored her this would. But she languished, and at length died; of water on the chest it was professionally said.

My father was very kind to us after that. And then we lost sight of him again, always on plea of "business, business." Sometimes he answered our letters; often not. People began to be shy of inquiring after him of us, and to think it best to ignore his existence.

But they could not at last; because it was publicly known that he had suddenly left the kingdom in a disgraceful manner. John was now junior partner in a respectable mercantile house, and led a respectable but somewhat selfish bachelor life, paying our allowances regularly, generally coupled with a letter of rather unnecessary advice. John, at this momentous crisis, was in the Channel Islands, and detained by contrary winds. We could not even get a letter to him. It was very well, therefore, for Marian to say,—"What will John think, I wonder?" and quite impossible for any one to answer her by saying *what* he would think: though we had our apprehensions that he would think differently from ourselves. John had good and generous qualities, though they were somewhat smothered by his business life. For my part, I thought it just as likely he would befriend us as not; and say we must not think of a school, or anything of the sort—he would represent my father, and make provision for us all if we would but be economical, and keep together,

and preserve, as far as in us lay, the respectability of "the family." I confess that this consoled me when I went to bed that night; and that, the more I lay awake and thought it over, the more likely it appeared. I did not in the least know what John's actual money-worth was; but estimated it, in a general way, at "something considerable."

CHAPTER III.

When gathering clouds around we view,
And days are dark, and friends are few,
On Him we'll lean, who, not in vain,
Experienced every human pain.
He sees our griefs, allays our fears,
And counts and treasures up our tears.

GRANT.

THE next morning, my little wheel-chair
was brought to the door.

I have forgotten to say, that I was crippled
in the hip-joint. It was owing to an accident.
One day, I was walking beside this very chair,
with my dear mother in it, when an overdriven
ox came racing down the street, and so frightened
the boy who was drawing the chair, that
he hauled it against a door-step, and overturned
it and my poor mother upon me. I, aiming to
save her (which I did), got a hurt which, I
suppose, will last all my life.

Dressed in my best mourning, therefore, I
sallied forth in state, drawn by the redoubtable
Hawkins, to call on Mrs. Meade. Things look
different in the morning light from what they
did overnight: the shadows fall all the other
way. I remember spoiling a pencil sketch by
forgetting this. It is curious, too, that we
should wake with different impressions from
those with which we fell asleep; especially
if we have not, consciously, been dreaming: but

so it is. I had fallen asleep sanguine ; I awoke sober, serious, and rather depressed.

I now felt a presentiment that John would *not* help us, contenting himself with a few kind speeches ; and that a school we should keep, and find it very up-hill work. But I kept these presentiments to myself ; because my sisters might have *their* presentiments too, and they seemed to be of a more cheerful description. Jacintha's smiles predominated over her sighs, as she prepared for her visit to her favourite friend ; and Marian talked like a sage and a saint.

Jacintha's choice of an intimate, it must be told, was not accordant with my judgment. Mrs. Forsyth had been known to me in her unmarried days, though not *well* known till long after I had fancied myself possessed of her character. She came once to pay us a long visit, when we lived near London. We were friends when she came into the house ; we were not friends when she went out of it. Neither were we foes ; we were simply acquaintance. I do not think it necessary to fall into rages at every fresh instance of hollowness, weakness, or treachery ; but friendship is a sacred thing, and I cannot entertain or profess it for any one whom I find dangerously weak, or hollow, or treacherous.

Jacintha's experience of her had not been mine, and there was no need to rob her of a friend, because I had lost one. Mrs. Forsyth gave very nice little music-parties, and Jacintha's voice was in request at them, so that the intercourse was pleasant to both.

As for Marian's crony, Mrs. Christmas, she was, emphatically, "a good old body," and nothing more. If a person were but good, Marian never considered their worldly insignificance: her thoughts were not of *theirs*, but of *them*.

Well,—I thought myself far more discerning in the choice of a counsellor and confidant than either of my sisters; and I think so still. Nevertheless, my heart was heavy as Hawkins jolted me along; and when I reached Mrs. Meade's large, quiet old mansion, which stood within a paved court, at the other end of the town, I was as tired and depressed as could be.

She was painting a primrose from nature when I went in. Though fifty years of age, she kept up her acquirements—not for display, but from pure love of their exercise. It was not often that I mustered energy to reach her; consequently, as her own health was delicate, we had not met for some time, and she heard me announced with surprise. She put down her brush in the middle of a wash, without minding a hard line, hastened to me and affectionately kissed me, and led me to a chair: then asked, with kind solicitude, how I was.

The Meades were in a superior position to our own, and did not visit in the same circle. Hence we saw less of them than we should otherwise have done; and though there was no pride in Mrs. Meade, and I felt a kind of instinctive persuasion that we were kindred souls, Jacintha, though invited to some of their grand parties, was a little afraid of them.

This feeling, in the present instance, was experienced by myself; I knew not how to begin, and, after answering kind inquiries concerning our health, a pause ensued.

I said, "I fear you must think it very odd I should call so early."

"Oh, no," said she kindly, "I am glad you have done so; because, later in the day, you might not have found me at home."

"And I particularly wished to find you at home,—and disengaged," said I, after another effort.

"I am *quite* disengaged," said she. "What is there I can do for you?"

My throat swelled. I said, "Perhaps you will be kind enough to give me a little advice."

"Oh, yes," said she cheerfully, "people are generally ready to do that: the only unreadiness they show is in taking it—not such people as you, though," added she, seeing my lip quiver.

"We are placed in rather trying circumstances, just now," said I; "and we don't see our way quite clearly."

"I am sure, then, I will help you, if I can," said Mrs. Meade. "What is it?"

"That's just what I find it so hard to tell you!" said I: a tear rolled down my cheek, and I could not at that moment get out another word.

"Take time, take time," said she softly, and pressing my hand in hers.

"My father—" began I, and stopped.

"We are great troubles to our fathers, sometimes," said she, with a little smile and a sigh, "and our fathers are sometimes trials

to us. Mine, you know, was quite out of his mind long before he died."

"That was a heavy affliction," said I. "Perhaps you may not consider mine so heavy, but yet I feel—"

"That the burthen of it is just now beyond your strength. Well, a burthen is often found too heavy for one, that is easily carried by two; and who knows but that before we part, I may help you to carry yours before God—*and there leave it?*"

Oh what a comforter that woman was! There was something in her tone, in her look, in her known character for sympathy and piety; but there was something in the words and thoughts themselves that contained good.

I asked her if she knew what my father had done. To my great surprise she did not: for I had fancied it must be known to all the world—at any rate, to our little world, in the length and breadth of it. But she assured me it was otherwise, and that people often give themselves unnecessary sorrow by fancying family scandals circulated much more widely than is the case. "And even when they do circulate," she added, "how often people live them down!"

So then my tongue was unloosed; and I told her, quite composedly, all that had happened—a tear now and then straying down my cheek.

She was greatly moved: I saw her eyelids quiver with emotion. She took my hand, kissed me, and sat quite quiet a little while.

"This is a crisis in your affairs," said she,

at length. "It is difficult to see plainly how to act. It seems to call for reference to a higher Power. Would you like to unite with me in prayer?"

"Beyond all things!" I exclaimed. On which she rose, locked the drawing-room door, knelt down, and uttered a most fervent and suitable prayer—I kneeling too, and softly repeating every word of it after her. It seemed to me that God, at that moment, knit our two hearts in one.

After that we talked the subject over quite calmly. I laid before her the exact state of our finances, without any reserves: she agreed with me, that unless John undertook to provide for us, we must do something for ourselves, and she thought a school would have many advantages, because it would enable us to keep together. She thought there was a very good opening for one where we were; that our house was well adapted for the purpose; that our characters and talents were such as promised success, and that she should very likely be able to procure us two or three pupils.

When she had said this, she unlocked the door, left the room, and presently returned with a little salver, on which were a glass of calf's-foot jelly and a meringue.

"You really must take this," said she cordially: "we are going to have a little party to-night (not of persons your sisters know or would care for, or I should have asked them), and our cook makes very nice jelly, as I hope you will allow when you have tasted it."

The refreshment was acceptable, for, being in weak health, I required to be helped along with frequent little restoratives. When I had partaken of it, and heard some more of her cheering and christian words, I took leave of her quite heartened, and proceeded to call on Mrs. Cole. This was with Mrs. Meade's concurrence, because she thought our plan would not seem so wild and hopeless to my brother, if we had any definite information on the subject, to supply the place of experience. To Mrs. Cole's I went, in too busy thought to attend much to the frequent jolts of my wheel-chair over the rough stones. I believe I was immersed in feeling rather than thought; I seemed to have been steeped in a warm bath of the milk of human kindness.

But the common air feels very cold when we step out of a warm bath; and so it did when I entered Mrs. Cole's chilly drawing-room, where the fire had but been hastily lighted when Hawkins rang the bell, and where I waited an awful length of time before Mrs. Cole sailed in, evidently in her best dress.

The room was in tip-top order, almost too clean and French-polished: not a thing out of place or in use. Everything looked stuck-up, like the reception-room of an old-fashioned schoolmistress.

My grandfather and grandmother had not been intimate with Mrs. Meade, whom they considered rather high and too serious; but many a cheerful rubber had they played with Mrs. Cole, who felt flattered by their cordiality, and reciprocated every kindness. She would

have been equally sociable with us; but Jacintha—and, I am afraid, I—drew back, and treated her rather distantly. We did not think an acquaintanceship with her would be quite in accordance with good taste. I don't feel quite sure, now, that our withdrawal from it was.

Be that as it might, directly she could do anything for us, you see, I went to her; which showed an instinctive perception that there was something worth having in her, after all. But, when she sailed in, she looked by no means overpowered by the honour of my call, and sat up very stiff and stately, looking as much as to say, "To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?"

I knew this would not do at all. If any coolness existed between us, I should get no good out of her; and I was determined to derive some good from her if I could. So I said—

"Mrs. Cole, ill news travels fast, and perhaps you have heard some of us. Have you?"

"No," said she, pricking up her ears and looking excited. "What is it?"

Then I told her. She was very much surprised, and said she was very sorry too. I think she was, though not like Mrs. Meade. It was humane, not sympathetic pity.

"Dear me, dear me, this is very sad," said she, stroking down her nice silk dress. "At your time of life, my dear madam, and in weak health, too, you ought to have nothing to harass you. And then there's Miss Jacintha not married yet, though a very fine woman;

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and Miss Marian coming on, too. Dear me, dear me!"

"Mrs. Cole," said I, "we are not going to make unreasonable demands on the compassion of our friends, but to put our own shoulders to the wheel."

"That's right, my dear ma'am; but in what way?"

"Well, we have been talking it over among ourselves, and certainly the most tempting plan seems to be that of which you, my dear Mrs. Cole, have had no mean experience—namely, opening a school."

"A school!" cried Mrs. Cole, reddening up: "surely that would be the last thing Miss Jacintha would consent to! She always appeared to me to entertain the utmost contempt for even successful heads of such establishments retired on their fortunes!"

"I am sure I am very sorry if Jacintha's manner has ever expressed this," said I, hastily, knowing very well that she cherished the feeling.

"Oh, let that pass, my dear madam—if offence was meant, none was taken, I can assure you!" replied Mrs. Cole, drawing up her short neck very majestically. "Old Mr. and Mrs. Edmonstone were very worthy people—exceedingly so; and I had a great regard for them, and would have had pleasure in being attentive to their grand-daughters, had the feeling been mutual. As it is, I can only wish them every success!—every success!"

"That is most kind and cordial of you," said I, "and I am sure that my dear grandfather, were he alive, would rejoice to hear

you say so, and feel every kindness to us as done to himself."

"Very probably he would, Miss Middlemass; for he was a very excellent man, and quite the gentleman. Many a rubber have we played together."

"And very fond he was of getting you for his partner, Mrs. Cole," said I; "for he always said you knew how to make the best of a good hand."

"Well, that was truly said, and handsomely said," returned Mrs. Cole, complacently; "quite like one of his kind speeches. This business of yours, my dear madam, would have vexed him sadly."

"There can be no doubt of that," said I. "I am glad he has been spared it; but yet, had he been alive, we should neither have wanted a protector nor a home."

"That's true enough," said Mrs. Cole; "but now that he is no more, and your father has behaved so shamefully badly, your brother, I should say, is your natural guardian and protector."

"True," said I, "but we do not like to be burthensome to him if we can provide for ourselves. There will be nothing to blush for in that, I think. And if any of our summer-day friends incline to drop us in our adversity, we can very well spare them," said I, with spirit.

"Right, right! I quite agree with you, Miss Middlemass," said Mrs. Cole, waxing cordial; "and anything I can do, I am sure, in the way of recommendation and patronage,

I shall be most happy to volunteer, for the sake of good old Mr. Edmonstone. It will, doubtless, go much against the grain with Miss Jacintha."

"We must all make the best of it," said I ; "and the patronage and recommendation you speak of, will be highly valuable and gratefully received. Indeed, some practical details from you, on a subject of which I profess myself lamentably ignorant, will be most acceptable to me."

"Well, then, my dear Miss Middlemass," said Mrs. Cole, warmly, and drawing her chair closer to me as she spoke, "let us go into it thoroughly at once. I can tell you all the routine, all the trials, all the difficulties, from first to last. You'll find it a precious worry, I can tell you. Under the most auspicious circumstances, scholastic tuition is a very great plague ; and, ten chances to one, you won't make it answer. You see you've had no experience, my dear ma'am ! — not even having been at school yourself. Things are carried on as differently in a private family, from what they are in a large establishment, as it is possible to conceive. Oh, if you knew what my responsibilities have been ! *and* anxieties ! *and* trials ! I am sure you would be ready to give it up in despair !"

And then she began her details, which were very wordy, very desultory, and, in many respects, very disheartening. One thing was certain, however,—she had retired on a good fortune. But, then, as she said, she had had a good training, good connections, and good

luck. We *might* have the last,—we certainly had not had the first,—and it remained to be proved what our connections would do for us.

With her permission, I took out my tablets. Warming with her subject, she gave me the most useful details of the daily minutæ of housekeeping for a large school, the consumption of food, the arrangements with trades-people and laundresses. We had a good laundry and mangle, and she advised me to have a laundry-maid in the house. As she was reputed to have kept a liberal establishment, I thought many of her arrangements rather mean, and probably demurred a little at them in my countenance, for she quickly said—

“*Not* mean—only close: and you *must* shave close if you keep a school and make it answer.”

I bowed, and went on with my notes. Then came the schoolroom routine—teachers, masters. Her account now became narrative instead of didactic, and my pencil was laid aside. My hair stood on end (metaphorically) at her relations of refractory, nay, depraved pupils, artful teachers, and no less wicked masters. Her whole story seemed founded on the text, “There is not one good, no, not one.” My heart sank when I thought of coping with such finished specimens of villainy; and when Mrs. Cole triumphantly related how she had suspected this and foiled that, and unmasked one and disgraced another, I felt that if I were to play the same part, however successfully, I should be lowered in my own eyes;

and as for my sisters, it was not to be thought of for a moment.

I suppose my face grew longer and longer ; for she checked herself, and said, heaving an apologetic sigh—

“ Yes, my dear ma’am, it’s all very sad and very shocking ; but, then, there’s the comfort that it does not all come on us at once. All these melancholy cases I have been running over, only occurred during a long course of years, at considerable intervals from one another ; and though none but such an established character as mine could have survived the obloquy occasioned by Miss Curlew, nor any ingenuity, much short of supernatural, have circumvented Monsieur Bougie, yet I never knew of any similar cases *quite* as bad ; and as for the daily worry and wear, why that you must expect.”

At this instant, the time-piece struck two. She asked me to lunch with her, but I declined, with thanks, assuring her we dined early, and apologising for having trespassed on her time and kindness so unmercifully. She said with great friendliness, that it was of no consequence, heartily wished me success, promised to do for us anything she could, and, to wind up all, sent her compliments and condolences to Miss Jacintha.

CHAPTER IV.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught,
That at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
And on its sounding anvil shaped,
Each burning deed and thought.

LONGFELLOW.

MY mind was so busy, that the way home appeared short. On reaching the house I was sensible of very great fatigue, and felt I must recruit and repose myself. I had no opportunity of doing so, however, for Jacintha met me at the drawing-room door with a woe-begone face, and was too much pre-occupied with her own experiences of the morning to think either of my details or my fatigue.

"Oh, this plan will never do, Isabella," said she, as soon as I dropped on the sofa; "Mrs. Forsyth says it will *never* do."

"Wait a little," said I, hastily giving Hawkins my bonnet, shawl, and gloves to carry away. "Now, what is it?"

Meanwhile, Marian, radiant with smiles, had looked in on us: had heard Jacintha's discouraging exclamation, and seen my jaded looks. Hastily saying, "How tired Isabella is!" she had withdrawn, followed by Hawkins.

"Now then, what is it?" said I. And

Jacintha poured out her woes. Mrs. Forsyth had been quite thunderstruck: Mrs. Forsyth was quite against it, and sure it would not do at all. We were not the sort of people to understand such a thing or make it answer; we should lose caste for nothing, forfeit our position, lose old friends, make no new ones, get into debt, difficulty, and trouble. And large tears rolled down Jacintha's cheeks.

"Trust me for not getting into debt," said I. "Mrs. Forsyth may drop us, but I am sure no real friends will; and whatever difficulties and trouble we may meet with (we shall be sure of *them*, whatever course we adopt,) we shall never incur disgrace."

"What Isabella says is quite true," said Marian, coming in with a cup of excellent arrowroot for me: "you *must* have this, Isabella; you require it, after your unusual exertions. Jacintha, you really must not take on this way, or you'll be the diet of worms!"

This set Jacintha off laughing; and Marian eagerly continued, "I've got a pupil!"

"*You, you chit,*" cried Jacintha, amazed.

"Yes! Fanny Ward!"

Jacintha's countenance fell: "Only a draper's daughter," said she.

"Yes, but he's a very good man, and a rich one too; and the best of it is that he will let me have her at once, Jacintha, to practise upon; just because he says he feels a kindness for me,—us, I mean,—and will pay us full terms from the very day she comes (that's to-morrow), without waiting for the school opening. And though she is to be paid for as

a boarder, she is only to be a day-scholar till we begin in earnest, so that she will not be in the way; and, whether the school comes to anything or not, no harm will be done, and I shall be getting my hand in nicely."

"I never heard such a thing in my life!" said Jacintha, breathlessly.

"This comes, Marian, of your saving Fanny Ward from being run over," cried I, "when she could scarcely walk alone, and you yourself were quite a child."

"I'd forgotten that," said Marian. "Oh no; it was so long ago, *he* must have forgotten it too."

I was convinced he had not; though I would not say so again. At any rate, I was sure our Heavenly Father had borne it in mind.

"Well," cried Jacintha, with spirit, "this revives me. I feel I can go on again. At the same time, tradesmen's daughters, as Mrs. Forsyth expressly said, are not—"

"Dinner's on table, ma'am," said Hawkins.

The announcement was opportune. It put an end to an anxious subject when we were all rather overwrought; and a good dinner put us in a condition to resume it far more cheerfully. I insisted on Jacintha's taking a glass of wine, though I was a water-drinker myself; and her views of affairs in general before and after dinner varied as much as mine had done night and morning.

After dinner, we drew round the fire, disposed to be very confidential; Jacintha peeling walnuts.

"Well," said I, "suppose we each tell our

stories, like people in a book. Marian, you begin, you are the youngest."

"Well," said Marian, "I went straight to that darling old Mrs. Christmas, whom I shall love as long as I live. She was looking over some bits of old yellow lace. She called me 'my dear,' took my hand in both her own, made me sit down next the fire, and was *so* kind. I,—I told her all about it and the good old soul cried, and kissed me, and talked over everything; and, when she heard we meant to keep a school, 'That will be *sure* to answer!' cried she; 'tell your dear good sisters to have *no* fears; they will be *sure* to make it *answer*.' And oh, Isabella and Jacintha!—she praised both of you so much. 'Whatever you do,' said she, 'will prosper, for the blessing of the Lord will be on you! You've been kind to other people in their troubles, and now other people will be kind to you. So clever as Miss Jacintha is, and such a superior woman as Miss Middlemass is, people will delight in sending their daughters to you, in the full confidence you will do the best for them you can: and when they find (as I'm sure they will find) what a very superior education you give them, why, there'll be quite a competition! and you'll be known all over the country! you will retire on handsome fortunes, and enjoy yourselves all the remainder of your days!—And, my dear,—if you should meanwhile ever be pressed for a little ready money, apply to me, for ten, for twenty, or for thirty pounds, according as you want it. *More* than that I don't keep in the house, and must send to the bank for;

but, as far as that goes, you may always apply to me without the least scruple, because I always have it by me.'"

"To think of that!" said Jacintha. "Good old soul! It really was very kind of her."

"Very kind indeed," said I. "Go on, Marian."

"So then," said Marian, "she sent over for Mr. Ward, who, you know, is her son-in-law; and, while he was being fetched, she turned over in her mind all the people she could think of who might help us to pupils. Mr. Ward came over at once, though it was close on his dinner-hour. 'Sam,' said she, 'the Miss Middlemasses, poor dears! are just now in family affliction—which we need not enter upon at present; and they have resolved to open a school. Could not you send them Fanny?' 'Surely I could,' said Mr. Ward, with his eyes as bright as beads, 'if Miss Marian will but make her like herself' (which was only his way of putting it, you know). 'I would give half the money I have realized,' continued he, cordially, 'if you would turn her out just such another as you are: and, since I know that cannot be, I shall esteem it a privilege to pay the best terms, whatever they are, for you to make the best of her you can.'"

"Very handsome indeed," said Jacintha. "I only wish—"

"So, then," pursued Marian, "I told him nothing was settled yet, and that the whole scheme, even, might come to the ground; but that, as it might *not*, I should be very glad to acquire a little practice without loss of time,

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and should wish to begin lessons with Fanny at once, to which he cheerfully consented, saying she would be better here than at home."

"Well," said Jacintha, "it seems a curious plan; but you have arranged it all now, and could not very well disappoint those who have behaved so kindly. I only wish the man were not—"

"Now, Jacintha, for your story," said I, "for I am impatient to come to my own."

"Oh, you may tell yours first," said Jacintha. "In fact, I've none to tell."

So then I spoke warmly, but in general terms, of Mrs. Meade's kindness and sympathy; and then went on to Mrs. Cole. They were both very much interested in my details.

"Come, this is practical," said Jacintha, at last. "I begin, for the first time, to see our way clearly. As for difficulties, I don't care a straw for them; in fact, I shall rather like them. There will be glory in overcoming them."

"I would rather not have any," said I; "but I do not fear to face them."

"Nor I," said Marian. "Now I may go to work with pen and paper in real earnest. All my estimates of last night are good for nothing. Let me put everything down, Isabella, while you have it so clearly in your head."

I thought it a good plan; and dictated to her, resting on my sofa, while Jacintha listened and ate her walnuts, sometimes making a remark.

Our united opinion was, that Mrs. Cole had afforded us an admirable skeleton of school routine, but that it was too much on the old

narrow-minded system ; that we might with advantage adhere to the general outline without crippling ourselves by the individual details ; and that if we did but turn out nice, intelligent, pure-minded, well instructed girls, the method of doing so might be safely entrusted to our own tastes and abilities. This was a very satisfactory arrangement to us all ; because each had little crotchets of our own, which we had long been fond of enlarging upon in theory, which we should now have the opportunity of putting into practice ; and each was generously ready to allow her neighbours their hobby if she had the free exercise of hers.

It was getting quite dusk, and Marian was obliged to give up writing, while Jacintha drew the crimson curtains across the windows and stirred the fire, but did not ring for candles.

“ I wonder — ” Marian was beginning, when the house-bell was rung loudly. We exchanged a quick look in silence.

The next minute the door opened, and a tall figure stood in the doorway, draped in a large blue travelling cloak, flung over one shoulder.

“ It’s John ! I knew it was ! ” cried Marian, starting up.

He hastily closed the door, advanced, embraced each of us with emotion, and then sat down and covered his face with his hands.

Poor John ! We were all very much touched.

“ This is a bad business, ” said he, drying his eyes. “ My poor sisters ! What a blow

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this must have been to you! And *I* away!
—Shocking! shocking!"

"It must have been a great shock to *you*," said I.

"Oh, terrible, terrible!" said he. "I was quite unprepared for it. I could not have thought it of the old gentleman."

John, up to this time, had always been accustomed to speak of my father with outward respect, though now and then he would lightly term him the "governor;" but now he sunk him at once and for a permanence, in his vocabulary, into "the old gentleman."

"Well, my poor sisters," said he, clearing his throat, "what do you mean to do?"

"We have been thinking it over, John," said I, "and we do not mean to be burthen-some to *you*."

"As for that," said he, shrugging his shoulders, "I must take what is sent me; for you can't possibly live on a hundred and fifty pounds a year, I'm afraid."

"No," said I, "I don't think we could."

"At any rate, not in this house," said he, looking about him; "nor in the way I should wish my sisters to live. No; this poor old house, I fear, must go. I was thinking about it on my way down. It will let, I should think, for a hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"Oh dear no, John, not even if we went to the expense of putting it into what auctioneers and appraisers call 'good, tenantable repair.' The old furniture looks very well, all in its place, but if pulled out of it would fetch next to nothing of a broker, while the old walls,

window-frames, and floors would look miserable. Even Mr. Duke's house, which, you know, is better and more modern than this, only lets for a hundred a year."

"But might not you let this house furnished, as it stands?" said John, after a moment's pause—"Say at eight guineas a week."

"Oh, who would give it, John? This is not a fashionable watering-place: it has not a single attraction for strangers: there are no mineral waters, no show-houses—it is not one of those places that have what is called their *season*."

"That's true," said John, ruefully; "I wish it were. Then, I suppose the best plan will be to sell the old place and take a smaller. You might add something to your income thus."

Jacintha was going hastily to answer; but I gave her a little look, and continued to be the spokeswoman.

"Say we made it up two hundred pounds," said I, "or a little over that,—with house-rent and taxes deducted from it, would not leave us much."

"But, my dear Isabella, what *do* you want?" cried John, hastily. "What is the smallest sum you think you *can* live upon? Three hundred a year? Very well: turn over this old house and its belongings to me to make the best of, and I will guarantee you the three hundred a year, your allowances inclusive."

I am now inclined to think this was a very kind offer of John's; it was one that, I

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believe, we should have been grateful for, when our position first broke upon us, and before we thought of the school. But, at the time it was made, we did not feel it so ; I saw Jacintha's head jerk, and even the gentle Marian look injured. We thought John was going to obtain the credit of being very generous to us, and the power of being very arbitrary with us, at an almost nominal price.

“No, no, my dear John,” said I, “this is a misfortune which you share in common with us all, and we have quite determined not to be burthensome to you.”

“How can you help it?” said he, knitting his brows a little.

“By doing something for ourselves.”

“What can you do?”

“Keep a school.”

“Not to be thought of !” cried he, with indignation and disgust. “*My* sisters keep a school !”

“But, John—” cried Jacintha, hotly.

“But, John,” said Marian, winningly, and twining her arm within his as she looked up into his face, “just hear Isabella out. You cannot think how nicely she has arranged it all. Just hear her.”

“What can any of you know of school-keeping ?” said he, very gruffly. “There is not a subject on which you are, all of you, more profoundly ignorant.”

“We *were* so, I grant you,” said I, “and we are wholly without experience ; but, since it has become a matter of consideration among

us, I have made it my duty to seek practical information of a lady experienced in tuition, who has retired on a good fortune."

"Humph!" said John, still very gloomy. "And what does she say?"

"She says," replied I, "that this house is better adapted for a school than for any other purpose;" and I gave him a general outline of our scheme, embellished with sundry business-like statistics; not a little encouraged by the approval which beamed, almost too visibly, in my sisters' eyes.

John was convinced. He held out awhile; and demurred about one thing and another; but gradually was overcome by argument and persuasion, and yielded the point very handsomely. Tea *à la fourchette* was introduced forthwith for his refreshment; he enjoyed the meal, praised everything, told Hawkins she grew younger every year, complimented Jaccintha on her good looks, and had many a pleasant word for me and Marian.

Altogether, it was a very grateful conclusion of a trying day. After tea, we again gathered round the fire, and discussed in a very harmonious, leisurely way, all that we had previously spoken of in haste and emotion; recapitulating what we had felt, and what we had feared, and what we had suspected, with a great deal more verbosity than would be tolerable, except in a sympathizing family circle. At length, when we seemed completely to have exhausted the subject, there was a pause; and then John said—

"I'm going to surprise you all. What do you think? I'm going to be married!"

It *did* surprise us. I suppose announcements of this kind generally do. We were wholly unprepared for it. What with his whist-clubs, his madrigal-clubs, his white-bait dinners, his drives in Hyde Park, &c., we had learnt to consider him a confirmed bachelor. We did not even know enough of his acquaintance to be able to conjecture who the lady might be; and when he added, "To Miss Laura Highworth," we were little wiser than before. Of course it was an interesting subject to him—and it was an interesting subject to us; so that he was secure of three good listeners while he expatiated on the family, fortune, and personal attractions of the happy fair. In spite of his vivid colouring, which rather dazzled us at first, she did not appear to be so formidably wealthy or well-born as to have a right to consider it a scandal that her husband's sisters should keep a school; on the contrary, John talked of the expenses of married life and liberal housekeeping in a depreciating tone, that made me think he was secretly glad to be well quit of the three hundred a year guarantee, after having offered it freely and handsomely. Each party was satisfied with their own bargain, and tolerably satisfied with one another. Some of Miss Laura Highworth's connexions, we afterwards found, were not only commercial, but in trade. This accounted for his merely saying, "Pooh, pooh," to Jacintha's, "But, John, I think we

ought from the first to exclude tradesmen's daughters."

"England is a nation of shopkeepers," said he. "It might not do, even for *us*, to trace our pedigree back too far: at any rate, I am not aware we can carry it beyond our great-grandfather!"

CHAPTER V.

We sat and talked, until the night,
Descending, filled the little room ;
Our faces faded from the sight,
Our voices only broke the gloom.
We spoke of many a vanished scene,
Of what we once had thought and said ;
Of what had been, and might have been,
And who was changed, and who was dead.

LONGFELLOW.

HOW tired I was that night ! I had a sad palpitation of the heart after I got to bed, and feared I must ring some one up ; but had just resolution enough to forbear. Of course, I was glad of it, when the palpitation had passed off ; and there is always a grand satisfaction at some notable piece of life's business being achieved, which even pain and weariness cannot deprive us of. It had been a memorable day to us all.

John slept in the house, but took leave of us before we departed for the night. He was to start at six o'clock in the mail, and I knew I could not with prudence rise so early to see him off. Marian, however, promised to do so ; and Jacintha said something about it ; but we all knew how to interpret speeches made by her overnight, about early rising in the morning.

Jacintha and I were just ready for breakfast when Marian returned, glowing with

exercise, from walking with John to the "White Hart."

"Well," said we both, "you have seen him off!"

"Oh, yes," replied she, gaily; "he is gone off in very good spirits."

"He is satisfied, then, with our plan?" said Jacintha, anxiously.

"Well," said Marian, dimpling, "he said something very improper about it."

"What was it?" cried I.

"He said, 'he feared we might find it a deuce of a worry.'"

Jacintha laughed.

"Very likely we may," said she. "Oh, I shall not mind that. I feel equal to anything, now that John supports us. What a difference it makes! We were all ready enough to say, 'Who cares for John?' when we thought he would be against us; but now that he is for us, we find we care for him a good deal."

"I think his approaching marriage has had a great effect upon him," said Marian. "He says he is so thankful everything was settled before this blow occurred. It might have made all the difference."

"I wonder what sort of a person she is," said Jacintha. "One would like to know."

"Oh, John has very good taste," said I; "and good judgment, too, when it is unbiassed."

Thus we chatted on, in high good-humour with him, ourselves, and one another, till breakfast was over.

After prayers, Jacintha retired to the drawing-room to write letters and draw up an

advertisement. I remained in the dining-room, where we were presently joined by Fanny Ward. She was a nice, fair, frank-looking, well-grown girl of eleven. I confess I was curious to observe how Marian would begin with her, but feared my presence would be rather a restraint to both. I therefore made a show of rising to carry my work into the other room, saying, "I am afraid I shall be in the way if I stay here;" but Marian replied, "Oh, no, if *we* are not in *your* way;" and Fanny looked quite unconcerned. Down I sat, therefore, again.

"Now then, Fanny," said Marian, seating herself beside her at the table, "first of all I must find out what you *can* do, that I may know what you cannot. Suppose we begin with writing. Here are pen, ink, and paper. Write down what I shall dictate,—

'Merrily sang the monks of Ely,
When Canute the king was rowing thereby.'

"Do you know who was King Canute, Fanny?"

"No," said Fanny. "He is not in my list of kings."

"Because your list of kings, probably, begins with William the Conqueror. But there were many kings of England, Fanny, before he came to reign over us. Did you never hear of the Saxons?"

She had heard of them.

Marian gave a brief synopsis of the history of England from the earliest times to the days of Canute, to which Fanny listened with

mute attention. Then she looked at the writing.

"It is not very well done," said Fanny.

"Never mind. What I wanted was to see your spelling." (Ha! thought I.) "Where is Ely, Fanny?"

Fanny could not say.

"Ely is in Cambridgeshire. Open that atlas. Turn to the map of England. Find Cambridgeshire. Find Ely. Yes, there it is. There was a famous monastery there in the time of Canute. He, and Emma, his queen—go on writing—were very fond of going there to stay with the good monks. Do you know what monks are?"

"Yes."

"One year, at the Festival of the Purification, the rivers and marshes were frozen over, and the king's courtiers tried to dissuade him from going to keep the festival at Ely, telling him the ice would not bear him. 'Well,' said he, 'I do not think it can be so thin but that it will bear me, who am light and thin, if I go on foot; and I am resolved to try, if any one of you will but go first to show me the way.' None of the courtiers much relished this proposal; however, an Ely man, who stood by, and who was nicknamed Pudding, because he was so fat, cried, 'I'll go before you, my lord king, with all the pleasure in life!' 'Forward, then, man!' cried Canute, laughing; and they passed safely across, the courtiers, ashamed and frightened, picking their way after them. Then said the king, 'You, Pudding the fat, shall henceforth be

Pudding the free, and your descendants and your lands shall be free for ever! So now, laugh and grow fatter!'"

"I like that story," said Fanny, when her pen had hastily scribbled it to the conclusion.

"Of course," said Marian, looking it over. "Ah, Fanny, here is some bad spelling this time. Correct *this*, and *this*, and *this*. That is right. Canute died in the year 1034. How long is that ago? Don't do it in your head, but on paper. Don't you know how? Subtract it from this present year. That is right. If the distance from York to Ely were a hundred and twenty miles, and Canute travelled from one to the other at the rate of thirty miles a day, how long would he be on the road?"

In this way, Marian went on, sounding the shallow depths of little Fanny's knowledge in every imaginable direction, with a practical simplicity that to me was surprising and interesting. Jacintha entered in the midst, to speak to me; listened for a minute to what was going on, arched her eyebrows and gave me a droll look, and went away. The two continued so indefatigably engaged in one thing after another, that at last I felt called on to say, "Well, now I think you have both done enough for the first morning, and Fanny had better take a run round the garden."

Both looked sorry; but the books were instantly cleared away, and Fanny, venturing to lay her hand on Marian's arm, said, "Won't you come too?" in so winning a way, that

Marian instantly answered, "To be sure I will;" and was off with her the next moment.

"Dear me," said Jacintha, looking out at them from the window, "I am afraid Marian is permitting too much familiarity in that child. They are now having a game of *les graces*. And, if you observed, Fanny addressed her without saying 'ma'am.'"

"Yes," said I, "my dear Jacintha, this advertisement will do extremely well. We must get Mr. Price to place it in a prominent position in our county paper. The circular, too, will do very well, I think, slightly abridged. By the way, I see you have adopted 'the Misses Middlemass!'"

"Yes;" reluctantly said Jacintha; "it would not do, you know, to start with questionable grammar. Do you think I have said too much, then, in the circular?"

"Rather too much. I will correct it in pencil."

"Well,—yes—you have improved it. I will take it at once to Mr. Price, and find how much it will cost to have five hundred struck off."

"Two hundred. Suppose—nay, surely one hundred—"

"Oh, that would be quite insufficient; don't let us do things by halves." And away went Jacintha, rather pleased at the idea of seeing herself in print.

She had scarcely gone, when there was a double knock; and Mr. Duncan was announced. He was a very handsome man, a married man of forty or thereabout; an opulent tea-dealer,

and the first-cousin of our member. We were not on visiting terms.

After a few polite preliminaries, "I have called, Miss Middlemass," said he, "in consequence of learning from my friend, Mrs. Meade, that you are intending to open a school. I cannot say how glad I shall be to avail myself of the opportunity of placing under your care my two little girls, who left their preparatory school at Brighton this Christmas, in consequence of an epidemic among the scholars. They have been at home ever since, and are getting a little undisciplined, but we do not wish them to return to Brighton. We should prefer having them nearer home. So that, if it meets with your approbation—"

"You are very kind, indeed!" said I warmly.

"Why," said he, hesitating a little, "I was not quite sure whether you would be too exclusive to admit the children of tradespeople; I, you know, am nothing but a tradesman."

"You, Mr. Duncan?"

"That's all," said he, with proud humility.

"You need have no misgivings," said I, "for we have already accepted Mr. Ward's little girl for a pupil."

"Oh," said he, with a little shade crossing his brow. And I saw directly that he looked down on Mr. Ward, though he would not have liked us to look down on himself.

"Mr. Ward is a highly respectable man," said he.

"And he has come forward so handsomely," said I, "that we could not well refuse."

"Well, then, after the Easter holidays (if

you open so soon), we may look on the thing as settled," said Mr. Duncan. "I shall leave my wife to make minor arrangements."

And after a little friendly chat, he went away. Then came Mrs. Meade. Her visit was a treat to Marian as well as myself; Fanny having gone home to dinner. She had scarcely left us, when Mrs. Cole called. She was very friendly indeed, though Jacintha might have felt her patronizing; but sympathy was just then so prized by me that I was not disposed to be fastidious.

The news of our project was beginning to creep out, though as yet it had spread but little. This gave us leisure to digest our plans. On the following Sunday, when I took my accustomed place in our large, square, high-backed pew, with its old oaken seats and faded green hassocks and curtains, I could not help sighing to think how soon its privacy would be invaded by a set of restless young spirits, my watchfulness over whose demeanour would sadly detract from my devotion. The future trial enhanced the present privilege; and most fervently did I pray for our strength and success: not forgetting to seek a special blessing on the young souls we were to educate for immortality.

Our advertisement had come out in the Saturday's county paper, consequently we were no longer private characters; and we felt a sort of consciousness, as our eyes met those of other people, who, for aught we knew, had seen our names in the public print, and already canvassed our objects, motives, and the chances of our success. We could not settle

to our Sunday reading that evening. Each had her book—Jacintha her favourite Fénelon, I my Leighton on St. Peter, and Marian her little morocco-bound Bible; but we were continually falling into snatches of talk, or yielding to reverie.

“After all, it is a very high destiny,” said Marian pensively, “to train the young.”

“Certainly it is,” said I. “It gives the bent to their future characters and lives.”

“Then why are schoolmistresses slightly thought of?”

“Partly through the narrow-mindedness of others,” said I, “and partly through their own, which prevents their taking a high view of their vocation.”

“I mean to take a high view of it.”

“So do I.”

“By the bye,” cried Jacintha abruptly, “we must have this room cleared out.”

“Oh!—why?”

“Who ever heard of a schoolroom furnished in this way?”

“I really see no supreme good,” said I, “in making girls more uncomfortable at school than they are at home. What is there here they can spoil, or would wish or should be allowed to injure? and where is the moral advantage of carpetless, curtainless rooms? We are not going to bring up young Spartans, but young ladies; and surely, ladylike habits may best be cultivated amid the appliances of a lady’s home?”

“That never struck me,” said Jacintha reflectingly, “but I think you are right. How I

wish I had put something about it in the prospectus ! It would be almost worth while to have a new set struck off. It would give an air to the school, you see ! ”

“ Oh no, there is no need to have a new set, nor to start with too much self-puffery. They are sealed and directed, now, ready to send off to-morrow.”

At bedtime I perceived that Hawkins was troubled.

“ You do not look well this evening,” said I to her, “ I fear you have one of your bad headaches.”

“ Oh no, 'tis n't that,” said she, applying the corner of her apron to her eye, “ though my head does ache, 'tis true. But I've heard something that *gri-eves* me ! They do say, ma'am, below, that you and the ladies is going to keep a school.”

“ Who say so ? ” inquired I hastily.

“ Mr. Perkins, ma'am, cook's father : he says he's seen it in print. But, there ! I told him I could not believe it.”

“ It is true, however, my dear Hawkins, though I would not say anything to you about it sooner than I could help. We are all of a mind about it, Mr. John and all ; and we feel it our duty, and hope for the blessing of God upon us in its performance. But if you, Hawkins, feel unequal to the stir and bustle of such an increased household as ours is likely to be, I assure you that I shall not take it in the least amiss of you if you say you should prefer seeking a quieter place. At the same time, we will make it as easy as we can for you ; extra help,

of course, we must have; but you are so tried and faithful a servant, that I confess to you I shall feel, if you leave us, that we have sustained a heavy loss."

"Bless you, I'm not thinking of *going*!" cried Hawkins. "That *would* be a pretty piece of work! Why, all you earned upstairs would be wasted in the kitchen! No, no. I'm very sorry there's any occasion for such a thing; but, since there is, why, all I can say is, I'll do the best for ye I can, as I've always done before!"

This was most heartening to me, as I had been sadly afraid of Hawkins taking alarm at untried labours: and I slept all the more quietly for the assurance of her allegiance.

The next day, the important circulars were issued; and, from that moment, we felt that we had stepped forth from "the mild majesty of private life" into the busy, bustling, striving world. It seemed quite strange to us, when evening drew in, that the day had passed by even more quietly than usual. It was so with the next, and the next. Only Fanny Ward invaded our privacy. Then letters of condolence and inquiry began to arrive from friends, acquaintance, and strangers. Some promised to be useful to us; others feared we should get into trouble; and others offered impracticable or unpalatable advice. All this was ordinary enough. Then I found myself in correspondence with persons I had never seen, about details we had not yet decided on ourselves, and was obliged to be very careful not to commit myself. Mrs. Forsyth's feel-

ings were, doubtless, cruelly mangled by the advertisement and circulars of persons on her visiting list ; but, when she found Mrs. Meade had taken us up, she began to think it would be good taste to do so too ; and she told Jacintha she was making strenuous exertions to procure us some very charming, aristocratic girls, who would give a stamp to the school. She inquired whether any pupils were yet secured ; but her countenance fell when she heard the names of Ward and Duncan ; and she hoped that we might not prove penny wise and pound foolish in accepting them at any price. A few days of silence intervened : then arrived three diminutive sheets of rose-tinted newspaper from Mrs. Forsyth to Jacintha. The mother of the charming, aristocratic girls could not think of their associating with tradesmen's daughters. Our school must be unstamped.

"We may have taken a false step," said I, thoughtfully, and returning Jacintha the letter. "It is impossible for us, as yet, to tell—I am no leveller of artificial distinctions ; but yet I *cannot* feel we have done wrong in availing ourselves of the kindness of Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan."

"Time will show," said Jacintha, gravely ; and she was evidently depressed during the remainder of the day.

Meanwhile, it would be difficult to decide whether Marian or Fanny Ward were working hardest or with the most zealous will. The progress they were making was prodigious—quite in an irregular way, as Jacintha justly enough observed : but still the amount and

variety of knowledge Fanny was acquiring was something amazing.

One afternoon Mr. Ward called on me—his good-tempered face shining with pleasure.

“I really cannot forbear intruding on you, Miss Middlemass,” said he, “to express my gratification at the progress my little girl is making. It’s surprising! ma’am—its perfectly surprising! Mr. and Mrs. Duncan did us the favour of dining with us in a friendly way yesterday, and when they heard and saw what Fanny was, and what she could do, they were quite surprised and gratified. And it’s not only her head-knowledge, ma’am, though that’s something;—but Miss Marian can impart Christianity, and gentleness, and good temper, and good behaviour; and those are things, ma’am, that I, a plain man, think quite as much of as the use of the globes!”

It was very encouraging.

CHAPTER VI.

Uprouse ye then, my merry, merry, men,
For 'tis our *opening day*!

JOANNA BAILLIE.

THE grand, the important day, the opening day, arrived. How many times did I go into every room, look at each little white bed, see that everything was as it should be, and then return to my sofa, to remember something I had forgotten, and repeat my round !

Fanny Ward had arrived the previous evening, as an inmate,—a privilege for which she had been burning,—and already considered herself an established resident. This girl had conceived a strong affection for all of us, an intense love for Marian ; and it was difficult not to reciprocate it, and to fancy her some young kinswoman, whose credit and interests were involved in the same concern. All the morning she was assisting in various little arrangements with the most pleasing alacrity, at everybody's call, running on messages, upstairs, downstairs, without the least obtrusiveness or fuss.

“Jacintha ! where are my keys ?”

“Here, Fanny ! run with these keys to Miss Middlemass.”

“Fanny ! Miss Marian is calling you.”

“Oh, Fanny, do help me to carry away all

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these old music-books. No! you can't carry them all, they are too heavy—I will help you."

Fanny, however, triumphantly bore them off, and then returned for some other errand. Now and then, I saw her arm slip round Marian's waist. "The girls"—"the girls"—were frequently in her mouth.

"Fanny, you must call them young ladies. And, remember, you must always henceforth say 'ma'am,' even to me."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Good girl. Not broadly, you know, but slightly, lightly."

"Yes, ma'am."

"That's it. You are going to be my tame elephant, you know, Fanny, and to teach the others how to fall into the right ways. You are not going to let them ever see the least insubordination or indiscretion on your part."

"Certainly, I ain't," said Fanny, aggrieved.

"You must not say 'ain't,' Fanny."

"Bain't?" said Fanny, pursing up her mouth, and looking droll.

A pat was her rebuke: but a little smile followed it.

"Oh no," said Fanny, very seriously. "I only said that for fun, and I am never going to say such things when the others come. I will not give you the least morsel of trouble, if I can help it. I would rather save you a great deal! Only give me just a smile, or a kiss, or a pat, now and then, when nobody is by."

"Well, I'll think of it, Fanny."

Seven pupils were expected. The first was to come at about four o'clock, by the heavy

coach, from some distance. Fanny sat near the window, anxiously watching for her, and, at intervals, reading Jane Taylor's "Correspondence between a Mother and a Daughter at School," frequently expressing her intention to be another Grace Dacre.

"Here comes Miss Unwin!" said she at last. "Is there any reason, Miss Middlemass, why we should not call one another by our Christian names?"

"Well—no, I think not," said I.

"Isabella!" said Jacintha in an undertone, "you really must leave off speaking in that undecided way. 'I think not,' will never do for a schoolmistress!"

"True," said I; and, at the same instant, Hawkins ushered in the new comer.

She looked formal and shy. Jacintha and I received her with kindness; and then Marian and Fanny carried her off to her room.

In about an hour Marian returned, saying she had left the two girls to get on together, which they were doing very well, and that Miss Unwin's ice was rapidly thawing under Fanny's sociability.

Next came the two Miss Duncans, under the escort of their pleasant father. He was "quite sure we should find them very good girls indeed, and that they would like school very much;" and while they, like Miss Unwin, were carried off by Marian and Fanny, he remained to have a little sociable chat with Jacintha and me. Jacintha was in good spirits, and looking her best; she was pleased by his encouraging auguries, and told him that she

did not feel at all doubtful of success. "And we are all going to be very comfortable together," said she. "Just come and see, Mr. Duncan, what a nice schoolroom we have prepared for them."

We all three rose, and crossed the hall, and she triumphantly threw open the door.

"This! *This* the schoolroom?" cried Mr. Duncan, whose little girls had now returned, and were nestling close to him. "Why this is a palace! and my little girls will think themselves princesses! Why, this beautiful room is replete with every comfort!—and elegance too! Dear me, how surprised and delighted mamma will be when I tell her. Well, girls, I can only say, you must be very grateful to these kind ladies, and not give them one bit of trouble you can help. And now good-by, darlings, and may God bless you!"

A tear shone in the eyes of each little girl as they saw him depart, but Fanny said something cheerful to them the next minute, and presently they were summoned to tea.

As they took their seats, and glanced round with satisfaction at the nicely arranged tea-table, on which our thin bread-and-butter and my dry toast were flanked by currant buns and very plain cake, for their young, healthy appetites, I overheard one little girl whisper to another with an eager smile, "Quite like a party!"

And they behaved as well as if it were a party; and we all talked our full share, and were very cheerful. After tea, I produced the large folio engravings published with the first edition of Captain Cook's Voyages, and these

afforded entertainment for the rest of the evening.

The other girls arrived late by the mail. Poor children! they looked so dreadfully sleepy. Tea restored them a little, and we then had the prayer-bell rung. Four servants came in, the cook, laundry-maid, Hawkins, and an under housemaid. I read the twenty-third Psalm, and then prayed. A strong impulse led me, instead of using a printed form, to utter a short, fervent, extempore prayer, in simple language, adapted to our immediate circumstances. I had never done such a thing before, and my face glowed; but I felt it was effective, and trusted it would be effectual. I always did so thenceforth. When we rose from our knees, Jacintha led the Evening Hymn on the piano, and we all sang it. The children looked surprised, impressed, and pleased; it was sweet to hear their young, unsteady voices—

Humble though our efforts be,
And untuneable the parts;
God accepts the minstrelsy,
If it spring from grateful hearts.

Then I called them to me and kissed each of them; and Marian led them off to bed. When she returned to supper, she said they had said their prayers, and were all asleep.

“Thank God!” said I; “thank God this day is well and happily over!”

“Amen,” said my sisters.

“Isabella,” said Jacintha, “how *could* you have the courage to pray extempore?”

"I had an odd kind of feeling when I had once begun. I feared you might not like it, but I resolved to go on."

"I liked it very much; only I wondered how you *could*."

"They all liked the singing," said Marian.

"We all like something in which we can take our own share," said I; "it awakens devotion and keeps it awake."

"The buns, also, were duly appreciated," said Marian, laughing.

"I mean to have them once or twice a week. It will give a little air of festivity to the table, and save Hawkins the cutting so much bread-and-butter."

"We must take care not to pet them much at first," said Jacintha, "or they will depend on it afterwards."

"Not *too* much," said I. "But dependence on others' kindness, on reasonable grounds, is no bad bulwark of mind and temper."

I would not go to bed, old maid that I was! without looking in on the little dears in their snug beds. All were in rosy sleep, save one; she started, and hastily said, "Mamma!" then, with a satisfied "oh!" closed her eyes again, murmuring "it's just like home." She could not have paid a greater compliment.

I lay down to rest, but not to sleep, with an oppressive sense of responsibility. Most fervently I prayed God to

Bless the house from nightly harm.

It seemed to me that no earthly insurance was worthy of any dependence. I wondered

how parents of large families could sleep at night, in a world where fire burns and thieves break in. At length I remembered that they had the same heavenly Friend whom I had been seeking, and that He never fails his people.

It had already been decided, against my will, that I was not strong enough to take part in any of the proceedings before breakfast. As a set-off against this, I had obtained that we should all have our meals together. None of us were epicures; and the good, plain fare, and early hours, suited to our young charges, were not unpalatable to us. As for rest and quiet, none of us then thought of needing either. We were buckling on our armour, not laying it aside after a hard-fought field.

They all came in fresh and rosy when the prayer-bell rang. When they gathered round the breakfast table I was surprised to find how much had already been done. Jacintha had given two music lessons, and Marian had had a general Scriptural examination. And, after this, they had found time for a healthy run round the garden before the bell rang.

Marian had brought in a few hepaticas, which she placed in water in the little room formerly appropriated to my grandmother, and now my morning room. When I had given my orders for the day (which, having previously well digested, gave me less trouble this first morning than on many a subsequent one), I returned to this room, and found a quiet little girl copying the flowers in pencil. I gave her a hint or two, and then returned to my sofa

and plain-work, of which there was still a good deal in the way of table and bed-linen to get through ; and another little girl came in to me and began to read Markham's "History of England." When she had read enough, she changed with the other, and drew while the first read, afterwards Marian fetched them both away, and sent another to practise. I must own to not being fond of hearing girls strumming ; however, it was all in the day's work—a good deal of it, too ! And though I could not sit up at the piano and give a regular lesson like Jacintha, yet, having a good ear, I could say, "my dear, B flat," or "C sharp," and so forth, whenever I heard a false note, or say, "you made that a crotchet instead of a quaver." This acted as a check, and prevented the practising in the teacher's absence from being the witless waste of time it too often is.

When this girl and another had gone away, Jacintha looked in on me for a minute, to say, with interest—

" Well, how are you getting on ? "

" Very well. How are you ? "

" Very well indeed. Really I rather like it. They seem bright girls, and docile too. Have you had too much practising ? "

" Oh, no ! "

" That's a good thing, because you are going to have some more, while I give music-lessons in the drawing-room. By the by, I am getting very hungry."

" I dare say they are too. You shall all have plain cake at twelve o'clock."

“Should not the children have bread?”

“Well, we are not very fond of dry bread ourselves, and cannot expect them to be. I have made a very economical arrangement with the baker; the cakes are little more than bread sweetened and slightly spiced; and we are paid so handsomely for these children that I do not wish to ‘shave’ quite as closely as Mrs. Cole recommended.”

“You are *maitresse-d'hôtel*,” said Jacintha with perfect good humour.

At three we dined. At four they all started for a walk—Jacintha taking the lead with the two eldest by a different route to a given point from Marian, because she did not yet like closing a boarding-school procession of two-and-two.

I enjoyed the lull. My health was but what Scotch people call “silly,” and I was not yet quite equal to the bustle of a large establishment. But I “bated no jot of heart nor hope;” only I *enjoyed the lull*, that was all. And the use I made of it was, firstly, to lie on the sofa awhile, in perfect inaction, without thinking particularly of anything; then writing a cheerful letter to John, telling him we had made a brave beginning and were all doing wonders; and begging to be most kindly remembered to his fair lady. (What bad grammar ‘remembered *to*’ a person is!) Just as I had closed my letter, I had the refreshment of a visit from kind Mrs. Meade; and then I summoned Hawkins, and bade her draw me in my wheelchair along the laurels in the sun.

After the walkers returned, rosy and joyous,

fancy-work and French reading were the order of the day. This gave repose to all ; and, as they had brought home some wild-flowers, I gave a botany lesson to a class of four. It is not needful to go into more details of the day's work ; we all agreed afterwards that a great deal had been done and well done, at a moderate cost of fatigue. Teachers and pupils were equally fresh at their work. We did not have buns or cake this evening ; but the meal was equally pleasant ; nay, more so, I think. I have often heard much inferior table-talk in much superior circles. After tea there were exercises to write, and arithmetical questions to solve. Then came a historical game, then prayers and "good night." Our review of the day was very pleasant. I was particularly amused at Fanny Ward's confidential whisper as she kissed me—"How well it has gone off!"

The next day there was variety in the lessons learnt and given, but there was equal order and regularity. The weather was changeable ; I therefore recommended a walk before dinner instead of after, which was well, as they secured a nice dry walk, and the afternoon set in wet. A good many lessons were got through in the afternoon, and needlework was postponed till the evening. I took even my sisters by surprise by plates heaped with short-bread at tea-time ; and afterwards, when I saw Jacintha look round with rather a fatigued air, that expressed, "Well, what must be done next?" I said, "My dear Jacintha, if it is not asking too much, I should very much like you to

oblige us with one of my favourite songs. In attending so much to the practising of others, you must not neglect practising yourself."

Jacintha was pleased, and instantly complied. The young auditors were struck by her brilliant performance, and one or two drew near her. It gratified her. "Come," said she, "why should not we learn an easy glee? 'Five times by the taper's light,' or 'Piano, pianissimo?'" A little choir was instantly organized: and after that, I had enough (I don't say too much) of

'Where's father?' 'He's gone out to roam,'
and

'Piano, pianissimo! senza parlar.'

They soon learnt their separate parts very nicely; and, thenceforth, glee-singing became a favourite evening amusement. One of the little Duncans made a droll mistake. She said, "Why should their father go to *Rome*?"

As Marian observed, instruction is not less instructive for being entertaining. While the glee-singers were gathered round the piano, the needles of the others sped swiftly; and sometimes one of them played a game of chess with me—not quite worthy of being printed in the *Illustrated London News*.

The following day was wet without intermission. It was suitable, therefore, for a dancing lesson; and Jacintha presided at the piano while Marian was dancing-mistress. Marian had once had a winter's teaching from the best of London dancing-mistresses, whose name I need not mention.

In the evening we had reading aloud and working, instead of music. The story was Miss Edgeworth's "Angelina; or, L'Amie Inconnue," which produced a great deal of laughing, especially the chapters read by Marian, who humorously gave the national accents of the Welsh country-girl and Irish hackney-coachman. I observed that the readers who followed her copied her in this, and endeavoured to produce the same effect.

At the end of a week, we seemed to have kept school a month; at the end of a month, we seemed to have kept school three months; at the end of three months, we seemed to have kept school a year. The routine and discipline had become perfect: the children were healthy, happy, and making great progress; their teachers were a good deal fagged, but kept on cheerily. I found my liberal housekeeping certainly threatened to diminish our profits, but not so much so as to render it a matter of duty to draw in. Sometimes Marian had bad headaches, which made her look very white; but, otherwise, she seemed to have nothing to complain of. Jacintha occasionally looked worn and dispirited, but I whispered to her, "Midsummer is at hand!" and she cleared up again, and went on nobly.

CHAPTER VII.

By what astrology of fear or hope
Dare I to cast thy horoscope?
Like the new moon thy life appears,
A little strip of silver light;
And widening outward into night,
The shadowy disc of future years.

LONGFELLOW.

ABOUT a month before the holidays, Jacintha received a very kind letter from John, saying that he was going to be married in five weeks, and that it was his bride's wish, as well as his own, that Jacintha should be bridesmaid, and accompany them on their wedding excursion. This invitation was very opportune: Jacintha both needed and deserved relaxation after her indefatigable labours; and the prospect of joining the wedding party flattered her and raised her spirits. It reacted on her daily exertions: never had the children found her in better humour, and her cheerfulness pervaded the house.

John was gratified by the cordial letter of thanks and acceptance; and, by the next post, sent her a twenty-pound note for her outfit, saying that he did not feel justified in drawing her into expenses she could ill afford, and only wished he could make it more. By the same post he inclosed me a thirty-pound note, to take Marian and me to the sea-side, while

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I have accepted an invitation to drink tea with the Wards. I am so sorry Mrs. Ward did not include you, Jacintha ! I suppose she was afraid."

"Oh, it is no disappointment to me, thank you," said Jacintha. "I would much rather stay with Isabella and get on with my dresses. See what a show we are making!"

"I'll come and help you with the bodices directly, Jacintha."

"Aye, do, there's a good child."

Marian was soon zealously at work ; and, when a visitor was announced, neither she nor Jacintha would quit their work. I had orders to say "they were particularly engaged." I had quite a little levée that afternoon, and everybody was so pleasant and kind ! Mr. Duncan, who was one of them, said—

"I understand we are to meet Miss Marian this evening."

"Oh, are you to be there?" said I. "I did not know there was to be a party."

So I told Marian of it when we met at dinner, which was late, just because we were not obliged to dine early. She thanked me for the information, and, when she came down from her simple toilette, she was in white muslin, with a crimson and blush rose in her bosom. She looked so lovely !

Jacintha, after surveying her attentively, said—

"It is a pity you are only going to a draper's!"

"Ah, that's a melancholy fact," said Marian, gaily. "I shall not break my heart about it.

Don't expect me till you see me. Mr. Ward promised to send me home."

"Ah!" said Jacintha, with a sigh, when she was gone, "if ever that hacknied line about the flower born to blush unseen were applicable to anybody, it is to Marian! What a pity!"

"Never mind," said I. "Perhaps I apply it to you; and perhaps our dear grandmother applied it to *me*. I am sure she thought so of Aunt Christy."

Marian returned late, which we did not mind, as we were able to get on all the more with the dresses. When she did come back, we heard the cheerful voices of more than one male escort wishing her good-by at the door; and in she came the next moment, fresh as a rose.

"Well," said she, gladly, and slipping off her shawl, "such a pleasant evening!"

"I am glad of that! Who saw you home?"

"Such capital companions! Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan!"

"Only Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan?" repeated Jacintha, with disappointment.

"Why, Jacintha! who *could* you expect?" said Marian, laughing.

"True! And were they, then, all your party?"

"All but old Mrs. Greene, and Mrs. Tabor, and Mrs. Duncan."

"What a stupid party!"

"Stupid? quite the reverse, I tell you! I only wish I could go to such a one every week."

"Why, what *did* you do?"

“I talked a great deal with Mrs. Ward and Mrs. Duncan; and also with Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan, whom I found very companionable indeed; and Fanny and I played ‘*Vous et Moi*’ in fine style, and brought down thunders of applause! Then we sang ‘*Where the bee sucks*,’ with equal success. Then I, by practice made bold, graciously assented to the united company’s proposal that ‘I would favour them with a song.’”

“English, I hope?”

“What, Italian would be wasted on them? Not so, Miss Jacintha! Mr. Duncan understands Italian, and sang ‘*Per valli, per boschi*’ with me!”

“Marian!”

“*He did!* There now, Jacintha! But I sang an English song first—two English songs afterwards.”

“What were they?”

“Firstly, ‘*Will you gang to the ewebuchts, Marian?*’”

“That’s Scotch!”

“And then, ‘*Kathleen mavourneen.*’”

“That’s Irish! What was the third?”

“*Why,—the third—was ‘Will ye gang to the ewebuchts’ over again.*”

“An encore! quite a compliment,” said Jacintha.

“Quite so. So it was meant. Mr. Duncan said he wished he could sing it himself.”

“What—

‘*Fain would I marry,
Fain would I marry,
Fain would I marry Marian?*’”

"If Marian would marry *me*," added Marian.
"Aye, it was very saucy of him."

"Well, I had no idea——" said Jacintha, dropping her work, and falling into a reverie.

"Jacintha!" cried Marian suddenly, and laughing heartily, "I'm playing you a trick!"

"A trick!" exclaimed I.

"Then, there *was* somebody else there!" cried Jacintha. "I was sure of it!"

"No, there was not!"

"Then, what is the truth?"

"I won't tell you till to-morrow! It will give you and Isabella something to think about."

"*Nobody* there, but Mr. and Mrs. Duncan, and the three old ladies?"

"No one else."

"And Mr. Duncan sings Italian?"

"And reads it, and has been in Italy!—"

"Well—'Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Dobbs' have been there too, Washington Irving says."

"But Mr. Duncan is neither Hobbs nor Dobbs: he talks well—entertainingly—interestingly."

"Oh! *I've* heard Mr. Duncan talk," said Jacintha, curling her lip.

"*Have you?*" returned Marian complacently. "Now then, I wish both you two ladies a very good-night. I suppose you have forgotten what o'clock it is; and yet this has not been an idle day." She was gone the next minute.

"What spirits she is in!" said I. "What a simple treat suffices her!"

"Simple enough," said Jacintha pondering, "if it be as she says. But yet, she owns she

has played us a trick—Oh ! I must find it out before I can sleep !”

And she hastily began to put away her work for the night, in which I assisted her. We had had supper and prayers long before.

When Jacintha tried Marian’s door, however, it was locked ; so she contented herself with giving it a shake, and crying out, “Naughty girl !” and went to bed.

I, for a wonder, was first down the following morning, for Jacintha always indulged in late rising when she could, and Marian, tired with her unwonted dissipation, overslept herself. My letters were lying on the breakfast table, and proved to be inquiries about school-matters, which put the party completely out of my head ; and when my sisters came down, I began to talk to them of the contents of these letters, which for a time engrossed us all. Then Jacintha opened and read aloud a letter from John, full of wedding arrangements, which interested us all very deeply. She was just beginning—“But, Marian, by the by—” when Hawkins came in about some trivial matter ; then the breakfast table was cleared, and Marian had disappeared before any one missed her. We soon heard her practising “do, re, mi, fa,”—but Jacintha and I were again too busy at the dresses to trouble ourselves about her.

About an hour afterwards, she put her head in at the door, saying, “Shall I come and help you now ?”

“Yes, by all means,” said Jacintha ; “for Hawkins is otherwise engaged.”

She immediately took up the bodice she was making, and re-commenced her work with great zeal.

"You must try this on, presently, Jacintha," said she; "it will soon be ready for fitting."

"Yes," said Jacintha, "but, in the meantime, pray enlighten us a little about that wonderful trick you played us last night."

"Why," said Marian, laughing, "the opportunity was irresistible—or at any rate, I was in high spirits, and found it so—like a girl let loose from school, in fact."

"Which you were," said I.

"Which I was," said Marian. "The capital joke consisted in my not telling you that the Mr. Duncan I met was not *our* Mr. Duncan, but another Mr. Duncan."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jacintha, dropping her work.

"The member?" cried I.

"No; the member's younger brother, Mr. Francis Duncan. Such a nice person!"

"Dear me!" said I.

"To think of his going to Mr. Ward's!" said Jacintha.

"Ay, there's no knowing what luck I might have missed by being as fastidious as you," said Marian, mischievously.

"No, indeed," said Jacintha, with seriousness.

"But you spoke of *Mrs.* Duncan," said I.

"Yes, that was our *Mrs.* Duncan who brought him. He is not married."

"Did you know of his being expected before you went?"

“Dear me, no,” said Marian. “Mrs. Ward even did not expect him: nor yet Mrs. Duncan. He had arrived uninvited, and, as our Mr. Duncan had a business engagement, and Mrs. Duncan was going to a little party, he readily went with her.”

“A very different one from the parties he is accustomed to, I should think,” said Jacintha.

“Probably,” said Marian. “But he did not seem grievously offended; and, as he is going home this morning, there is no danger of our again coming ‘betwixt the wind and his gentility.’”

“Going so soon!”

“Yes, to Pendynas, where his father’s great colliery-works are. Oh, Isabella! I must tell you! Mrs. Duncan is *so* delighted, already even, with the improvement in her little girls! She says that the education they are receiving will be worth any money to them, and is particularly valuable, because Mr. Duncan really is going to retire from business, and is in treaty for the purchase of a country estate.”

“Then we shall no longer have tradesmen’s *daughters*!” cried Jacintha. “Only a tradesman’s daughter!”

“Ah! I really think you would like to throw over poor Fanny!” said Marian.

“I care very little about it, now,” said Jacintha. “The mischief is done.”

“Well, the Wards seem to think the reverse of mischief has been done,” said Marian. “They are so pleased!”

“They ought to be!” said Jacintha.

"Apparently, we shall start with several older girls, after the holidays," said I.

"All the better," said Marian. "It will be so interesting to train them."

"A good deal more labour, though," said I.

"Oh, I don't regard that," said Marian.

"Nor I, in the least," said Jacintha, absently. "Isabella, would you mind lending me your pearl bracelets during the month?"

"Not at all," said I. "Only be careful of them, as they were a gift from my mother."

"Oh, of course I will. Thank you!"

"Yes," said Marian, pursuing her own reflections, "it certainly will be very interesting to have older girls to bring forward; and I much doubt whether it will not be less trouble instead of more, they will require so much less help, and will take an intelligent view of the purposes of their education."

"If you give it them!"

"Which, of course, we all shall. I look forward to it with pleasure. I would gladly begin with them to-morrow; only that I shall be the better for a little rest. Mr. Francis Duncan asked me how I liked school-keeping, and I told him 'very much.' He looked so incredulous!"

"Well he might," said Jacintha. "He knew it, then?"

"Oh, of course, his cousin had told him; or, if not, he would have learnt it in ten minutes, for everybody was asking, quite in a friendly way, how we were getting accustomed to it, and whether we were not very glad of the holidays."

"One of the friendly freedoms that might have been dispensed with," said Jacintha.

“I did not mind it; I did not wish to conceal it,” said Marian. “And when Mr. Duncan said he thought I must find it a bore, I told him ‘not at all,’ and gave him so many reasons for it that at length he saw the matter quite as I did. And now, Jacintha, you must try on this bodice before I can set another stitch.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Ah ! if thy fate, with anguish fraught,
Should be to wet the dusty soil
With the hot burning tears of toil,—
To struggle with imperious thought,
Until the overburthened brain,
Heavy with labour, faint with pain,
Like a jarred pendulum, retain
Only its motion, not its power :
Remember, in that perilous hour,
When most afflicted and oppressed,
From labour there shall come forth rest.

LONGFELLOW.

“ COME,” said I, after Marian had worked very busily for a couple of hours, “ you may now as well go and take one of your ‘solitary walks.’ ”

“ I mean to do so,” said Marian, “ as soon as I have set the last stitch in this bodice, which will be in two minutes ; and on my return, I shall have something very particular to do in my own room.”

“ ‘A good novel’ to read, probably,” said Jacintha.

“ Perhaps,” said Marian. “ Oh, I do not forget that these are my holidays ! ”

I was glad to hear her say so, for she was full as much in need of relaxation as Jacintha, and I saw no reason why, when one was going to have all the gaiety, the other should work for her as if she were paid by the day.

Marian went out ; and Jacintha observed, as she broke off her thread, “ I should not wonder if that Mr. Francis Duncan were to call here while she is away.”

“ I should, very much,” said I. “ These are not the days of Evelina and Cecilia, when gentlemen called in the morning on ladies they had danced with overnight.”

“ Mrs. Duncan might so easily bring him,” said Jacintha. However, the event proved me in the right, for the gentleman never made his appearance. Marian really had a solitary walk this time, and returned with a large nosegay of wild flowers, which she carried up to her own room, doubtless to make some grand experiment upon.

In a few days Jacintha departed in high spirits ; and Marian and I remained to make our little arrangements. Two of the servants were sent to visit their friends : another remained in charge, and Hawkins accompanied us to a little sea-bathing place called Fishport, about forty miles off.

The journey was performed safely and pleasantly. On reaching Fishport, we took a fly, and began to seek lodgings. There were not many, for it was quite a small place ; but a civil baker directed us to a neat house, the last of a row, facing the sea, and tenanted by two maiden sisters, who took lodgers, and “ did for them,” as the saying is.

The Misses Linnet might be fifty-five and fifty years of age. The eldest was tall, spare, stately, shrewd, and did all the bargaining with lodgers. The younger was a trim, active,

pleasant-looking little woman, who, with the assistance of an uncouth girl, got through everything that was to be done; always busy, and never out of temper.

It was a hard life: I often thought, with thankfulness, how much superior was our lot to theirs. But they were quite content: their education had not been such as to promise them success in any higher department; and they were thankful to keep together, and make both ends meet, at the price of any amount of trouble they were capable of.

"You see your accommodation, ladies," said Miss Linnet, with a gracious wave of her hand. "It is modest and unpretending; yet, such as it is, it has sufficed for the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon, and her companion, Miss Flipp. However, we do not boast much of our aristocracy—people come here to enjoy retirement and repose, and need not the gaudy gew-gaws of the world of fashion—which is the reason we have, as yet, no public rooms, though, doubtless, in time we shall compete with other watering-places."

Hawkins remarked afterwards of this lady, that "she seemed very choice in her expressions."

Of course, there was a fine sea smell and sea taste, and, of course, we had prawns for tea, and Marian resolved to bathe before breakfast. She enjoyed unpacking, and putting all my little useful things in handy places, and taking out her drawing-box, and writing-case, and sketch-book, and work basket. In five minutes after the unpacking was finished, she

tied on her bonnet to post a note I had written to Jacintha, to tell her our address—No. 12, Sea View. Miss Linnet showed Marian that the door could be opened from the outside, without taking the trouble to knock or ring every time she came in; which Marian thought delightfully unsophisticated, and I thought rather unsafe.

When Marian returned, she flew to the book-shelf to examine its contents. They comprised, "The Romance of the Forest," the "Mysteries of Udolpho," "Cœlebs in Search of a Wife," "Religious Courtship," "Memoirs of a Cavalier," the "Death of Abel," Glover's "Leonidas," and Robinson's "Scripture Characters." Marian said she should read them all, and I think she did. However, we had been provident enough to bring our own literature with us.

One of the characteristics of the present day, when everybody reads, or is supposed to read, is the terror created by the offer of a book. A friend listens to you with assumed interest while you dilate on the pleasure you have received from such and such a work, but if you are goose enough to add, "Shall I lend it you?" a look of the utmost dismay succeeds those of smiles, and the hurried answer is, "O no, no, I thank you! I am overwhelmed just now with books. Friends have lent me so many, and I have bought so many, and have so many from the public library and book-club, that I have more than I can possibly look into already!" This grievance had not made itself so powerfully felt in the days I am speaking of.

What a pleasant month that was! Marian delighted herself like a child, in pebbles, and shells, and sea-weeds, and spars, and different coloured sands, all of which she could manufacture into "something new and strange." She loved bathing, and would come in, her long dark hair hanging down her back, to breakfast, or join me where I sat on the shingle, reading or netting, and would read or net beside me. She loved talking to the old fishermen and their wives; and, under pretence of some very eligible investment in shrimps, or perhaps even a lobster or crab, would beguile them of many a chat that led to the story of some awful storm or shipwreck. One day, when we were sitting on the shingle, a poor old woman hobbled up to us with one or two sand-drawings for sale. They represented, or were meant to represent, the church and an old sea tower, but were in such wretched perspective, as to make one's eyes ache to look at. She said they were done by a son who was crippled by falling from the cliff. I bought one of the drawings out of charity, but Marian did better; she executed a few correct and pretty sand-drawings for the poor lad, showed him how to copy them, and thus enabled him to get shillings, instead of six-pences, for what were, after all, much better bargains to the purchasers.

During this recess, Marian wrote a tale, and composed a song, and drew a series of illustrations of Fishport, which the proprietor of the only library was glad to get engraved at the top of note-paper sheets. The tale was accepted by the editor of a local magazine, who

paid her ten shillings per double-column page : the song was printed after we went home. Of course the money was acceptable, and gave Marian the opportunity of various benevolences that in her circumstances could not be considered small. But I chiefly mention these things to show how her mind, like a flowing river, fertilised its course ; or, like a rich meadow, brought forth sweet flowers. Even in what she called idleness, she could not be idle ; and if she sat beside me on the shingle in profound silence, with her eyes upturned to the skies, or fixed on the advancing tide, I knew she was thinking how to make something clever, or do some one good.

Sometimes we talked in a leisurely way of the characters of our pupils, and our expectations of our new ones—arranged various little plans, and provided remedies for expected difficulties. We seemed to expect we should go on school-keeping all our lives. At any rate, there was no immediate prospect of our realizing fortunes.

“ Girls hate writing themes,” said Marian ; “ but there are plenty of other ways of teaching composition. I mean to set up a monthly periodical—in manuscript, of course,—and invite contributions in prose and verse, including short and spirited translations. The rewards to the best contributors shall be copies of the numbers in which their contributions appear. The copying will be a very good exercise.”

I laughed at a girl thinking it a *reward* to copy out a whole number for the sake of her own contribution.

"You will see," said Marian, with a confident look. "I know they will like it."

"Some of these girls," resumed she, "will be expected to go through a course of good English reading. What do you understand by a course of reading?"

"A course," said I, "may be either broad or long,—a race-course, for instance. A course of English reading in history need not embrace a long number of years, from Bede to Macaulay. Suppose you took a subject,—the Great Rebellion, for instance,—and read all the books you could get upon it,—Clarendon, Lucy Hutchinson, and so forth,—that would be a course of reading."

"And a very interesting one, too," said Marian. "That would be a broad course: I will keep it in mind."

We soon knew by sight the few visitors at this quiet little watering-place. There was an invalid gentleman and his anxious-looking little wife; there was the fat mother of a large family of unruly children, who screamed vigorously when they were bathed; there was a determined-looking woman with frowning brow and masculine step, who wore short petticoats, and paced up and down, apparently steeling herself for some disagreeable but necessary mode of action. There was a tall, mild-looking, dignified old lady, dressed in black, who supported herself on a tall, gold-headed cane, nearly as high as herself, and who moved very slowly, and looked very sweetly.

One day, when Marian had left me on my pile of cushions and shawls while she went to

bathe, I found lying on the shingle a book, which proved to be Cranz's "History of the Moravians." The name of Mary Heseltine was written in it; but, as I did not know who Mary Heseltine was, I thought the best way would be to take the book to the public library to be set in the window till claimed; and, meanwhile, I dipped into the book, which seemed attractive.

Presently a pleasant voice said quietly, "I hope my book interests you."

I started, and saw before me the tall old lady.

"Oh," said I, "I beg your pardon. You have relieved me from some embarrassment; for I was doubtful whether the only measure that occurred to me might secure the return of the book to its owner."

"I am much obliged to you for the trouble you meant to take," said she, settling herself on a little camp-stool, "and glad I have saved you any. You do not look very strong, any more than myself."

"I am not an invalid, however," said I. "I only came here for a little change during the holidays."

"You keep a school, then," said she, quickly. "Ah, I, too, know something of school-keeping, but of a different sort from what yours is likely to be."

"A Moravian one, probably," said I, glancing at the volume she had received from my hand.

"Yes," she replied; and seeing my look expressed interest, she frankly spoke of it,

and I drew from her many pleasing and instructive details. In the midst of them Marian returned, and silently seated herself beside me.

“Your sister, I conclude?” said Miss Heseltine.

“Yes,” said I, “she is as much concerned in school-keeping as I am—in fact, does a great deal more.”

“Then I need not mind going on,” said the old lady, with whom Marian soon became as much charmed as I was. From that time forth we used to meet daily, and derived both instruction and delight from her conversation. I have never seen her since; but I shall never forget her; and many things she said were not without their deep and lasting influence.

Marian and I could not help being amused by the eccentricities of our hostess, the eldest Miss Linnet. Some people, when they meet with a peculiar character, solve all difficulties by saying,—“I think he (or she) must be a little cracked.” That is not my way of accounting for it: I think there is an infinite variety in the human species, and that individual characteristics, when not rubbed down by too much intercourse with the world, continually display themselves with an originality that is both curious and entertaining.

The first morning, Hawkins came in to join us in family prayer as usual; the second day, the worthy old lady, when she had possessed herself of our wishes respecting dinner, smoothed her faded black silk apron with her hands, hemmed, and then said—

“Family worship formed no part of the

domestic routine of the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon. But since you ladies have chosen the better part, and are evidently two of the wise virgins who trimmed their lamps, I hope it will be considered neither presumptuous nor intrusive if I propose that my sister and self should avail ourselves, as we would so gladly do, of the opportunity, if you will admit us."

Of course I said I should be very glad; and thenceforth the two good creatures always joined us morning and evening.

One day I was seated in what they called the arbour, in their little mite of a garden. The sun was cheerful, but there was an easterly wind. Presently Miss Linnet approached me, carrying what appeared a very diminutive dog's kennel.

"Are your feet cold?" said she.

"Rather," said I.

"Then put them into this," said she, "and you will soon find them quite warm, for there is a nice little carpet inside. I often use it myself in the winter, for I am very fond of sitting with my back to the fire, by which means my feet are exposed to a cold draught from the door; but, with this little contrivance, I keep them quite snug."

I smiled and bowed, for I was afraid of laughing if I spoke; and she not only placed my feet in it, but tucked my dress in all round, which I secretly resolved to displace the instant she was gone. Just as she disappeared, however, I saw Marian coming in, and resolved to await her. The instant she saw me, she burst out laughing.

"Why," said she, "you taper off to a point like a well-cut pencil!"

This set me off; but I laughed softly lest I should wound the feelings of kind Miss Linnet. Marian had been to the post-office, and brought home a letter from Jacintha. It was full of praises of Guernsey, which she said was famous for "fruit, flowers, and friendship"—and, indeed, nothing could be more friendly than the attention she had received from Mrs. John Middlemass's family. We had previously had an account of the wedding, and now a succession of pleasure excursions on land and water left her little time for writing, but yet she managed to cross her full-filled sheets, deferring particulars of many agreeable incidents till we met.

A Mr. Mortlake figured a good deal in these letters; but, though Jacintha evidently liked him very much, she rather shunned than dilated on his merits. Marian and I were quite idle enough to fill up an imaginary sketch of him, but it was in pure folly, for he merely appeared to be a pleasant acquaintance. We were, in reality, much more interested in everything relating to our new sister-in-law. Here Jacintha was more minute; she spoke of her pretty height, pretty teeth, pretty hair, pretty complexion, till Marian said, "I can see her exactly!" And I thought I could, too; but, very likely her ideal and mine were not at all alike. Still, it was something to talk about, and as I would always sooner read or hear of a water-party than be of it, I was suited to my mind.

The holidays were but too soon ended. We

went home at the conclusion of the month, because we knew we should have a week's work before us in preparing for our pupils. The increase in their numbers called for additional servants, and we engaged a nice girl at Fishport, who was willing to be our under-housemaid.

Miss Linnet took quite a tender leave of us ; and though her sister said little, a tear twinkled in her eye, when Marian, who had taken a great fancy for her, begged her to accept a small prettily-bound copy of "Mason on Self-Knowledge."

"It is not my custom," said Miss Linnet, "to attach myself strongly to my lodgers, knowing that even where they are worthy objects of attachment, which is not always the case, such sentiments, at the mercy of continual separations, only lacerate the heart ; but this I will say, that never before did I feel my heart drawn towards any ladies as it has been towards the Misses Middlemass ; and I only hope, ladies, the feeling has been reciprocal !"

CHAPTER IX.

Stern daughter of the voice of God,
 Oh Duty ! if that name thou love,
Who art a light to guide, a rod
 To check the erring, and reprove ;
Thou who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe,
From vain temptations dost set free,
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity.

WORDSWORTH: *Ode to Duty.*

I CAN understand how a dog feels having his collar put on, after coming home from a walk. We had had such a pleasant holiday ! I shall always look back on it with pleasure—it was such a complete rest ! and Marian and I enjoyed our long, leisurely talks together so much, and it was so delightful to see her so improved in health and spirits, and looking so lovely !

And yet there was pleasure in returning to the old house, too ; and in receiving Jacintha when she returned, only two days before the school reopened, glowing with beauty and animation.

Jacintha was a very handsome woman—Rubens and Titian would have delighted in such a study : her form and features were perhaps on rather too large a scale, but their proportions were perfect ; and when she was

happy, there was a brightness about her that might, I think, be called fascinating.

She was almost too well dressed for travelling; but she said joyously, "I wanted to make a pleasant impression on you when I returned;" and the kind motive was rewarded with complete success. Then throughout the remainder of the evening we talked as only sisters can talk. Jacintha at first told us one thing and another rather disjointedly; but Marian exclaimed, "Oh, begin at the beginning, please!" and, laughing, she complied.

Hospitality seemed the marked feature in Mrs. John Middlemass's family. They were not refined, but they were sociable; at any rate the wedding festivities had shown or made them so. There seemed no end to the contrivances they had made to accommodate friends from a distance; no end to the number and abundance of the meals; no end to the succession of entertainments at their own and their neighbours' houses. Jacintha supposed one might have enough and too much of it for a continuance; but, for a little time, it was very pleasant, very delightful: it made such a thorough change. John had been very kind, and Laura quite sisterly. Oh, she was a nice creature, though she might not suit me and Marian as well as she suited her. Well, she could not say why, but we might think her too gay; but not at all to excess: she was going to keep house very judiciously, and not to exceed their means on any account.

Then, the house—what was it like? Oh, a very nice house—small, but compact, and

fitted up in very good taste. They were going to keep very little company, and live very quietly—at least, so John said.

Mr. Mortlake—his name slipped in so quietly!—and Marian and I were so careful not to look at one another! Had we exchanged a glance, we should have heard nothing; but our prudence was rewarded by hearing a good deal, one way or the other: and the result was, a conviction in our minds that he was an admirer—perhaps a serious admirer—of Jacintha's.

Usually she did not mind being rallied on such a topic; but there was a little flutter and hesitation about her first mention of him, that made us instinctively feel it was too tender to be jested with; and, after a little pause, she seemed to think, "Oh, they don't suspect anything," and went on freely; while we, sinners as we were, suspected all the while.

We went to bed in high good humour: the next day was equally cheerful, but a great deal was to be done in it, though much had been done before Jacintha returned.

The girls arrived: a dozen complete. Of the five new ones a few words may be said.

Mary Barnet was the daughter of a country clergyman. She had lost her mother, and was tenderly attached to her excellent father, to whom she desired to make herself as companionable and helpful as possible. Hence there was no emulation wanting to spur this good girl towards excellence in whatever she undertook; and as she was both clever and industrious, she promised to excel in every-

thing. Jacintha was delighted with her intelligence and docility, and soon found her her favourite pupil. She was nearly seventeen; pale, with red hair, grey eyes, and a pleasing expression, though she was not pretty. Her figure was neat, and she was as tall as Marian.

Rose and Henrietta Callender were sisters, of sixteen and fourteen. Rose was dark as a West Indian (indeed her mother was one), with an intelligent rather than handsome face; and, like Mary Barnet, she was both industrious and clever. These two had kindred minds, and were not long finding it out. Henrietta was prettier than her sister, but very inferior to her in abilities. She was gentle, languid, indolent, and very slow and unsatisfactory in her studies. Her mother said to this young girl, with the utmost *sang-froid*, "Henrietta, you can't be clever; so you had better be interesting."

Henrietta was perfectly free from envy, or from affectation. She admired her sister and Mary Barnet, and, as long as she was permitted to form a third in this bond of friendship, only aspired to the lowest place. It was pleasant to see these three girls, in their hours of relaxation, strolling about together, their arms interlaced, along the broad, straight garden walks; or, in-doors, with their three heads clustered together over some book or fancy-work.

Emma Grove was a long way behind these; but she was a nice, plodding, well-conducted girl, thick-set, fair, fresh-coloured, with blue eyes, auburn, curling hair, and an honest, intelligent countenance. She was fourteen.

Margaret Forest was thirteen: my first impression of her was unpleasant. Her eyes, hair, and skin were those of a gipsey; she was stunted, angular, awkward, with a hooked nose, thin lips, and a kind of Napoleonic fixity of countenance. Indeed, one evening, when they were acting *tableaux*, she personated Napoleon at Elba.

The sight of Fanny Ward's undisguised joy as she bounded into Marian's arms, and then joyfully, though more temperately, quitted Jacintha and myself, had an encouraging effect on the new comers, who looked as if they thought we must be comfortable people, to inspire such affection.

During tea, Marian remarked that, though it was now summer, winter would surely arrive in a few months, and that those who expected to have Christmas-trees to decorate at home, or intended to make little presents of their own manufacture to the different members of their households, might as well begin to think about them in time. "A needle is a woman's peculiar implement," said she, "and it is a disgrace not to know how to use it well; but there is no occasion to spend interminable hours at what the Scotch call 'white-seam:' let two days have their fitting allotment of plain work; but two others of work, whether plain or fancy, for charitable purposes, and the other two afternoons, which will be half-holidays, may enable us to get many pretty little Christmas gifts completed, without encroaching on our country rambles and other amusements."

"That will be delightful!" exclaimed Fanny;

and the others looked what she expressed. Tongues were immediately unloosed, and many pretty designs projected—enough to take a much longer time to execute.

“And then, about the charity-work,” said Mary Barnet, with a pleasant mixture of frankness and diffidence, “I shall be particularly glad to assist in that, and learn cutting out and contriving, as much as I can, because it will be so useful to me in our parish.”

“Let us arrange what we can do,” said the methodical Emma, taking out pocket-book and pencil.

“I can do nothing, I’m sure!” said Henrietta, rather helplessly.

“Yes, you can,” said her sister; “you can satin-stitch beautifully; and, if you begin in time, you may work mamma a pair of sleeves.”

“So I may,” said Henrietta, brightening.

“I shall do nothing,” said Margaret Forest, with decision; “I’ve no brothers nor sisters; and, if I had, they might work for themselves.”

Fanny Ward opened her eyes very wide; but Margaret Forest was not to be daunted by a look.

“If you’ve nobody at home to work for,” said a little girl, artlessly, “you may help some of us.”

“Thank you,” said Margaret, laconically.

The next morning, I could not help enjoying the pleased surprise of the girls, on seeing piles of French rolls on the breakfast-table, and a diminutive pat of butter on the plate of each.

“Dear me, this is very nice!” said Mary

Barnet in a low tone. "It does not seem at all like school."

We now made bread at home; and my cook, who was a very excellent baker, made rolls nearly as light as those in the shops, and that equally answered the purpose. We had taken counsel together, and agreed that each girl would eat no more bread in a tempting, than in a less attractive form; and in a little time each would get accustomed to her one roll, (which, I beg to say, contained as much bread as she would otherwise have eaten,) and, by each spreading her own, save considerable trouble to the servants. To make sure of no stinting, however, a large household loaf was placed on the table; but no one but Margaret Forest asked for any of it; and when she found she must eat it dry,—having finished her pat of butter,—she left half untouched. She was thenceforth the only girl who ever asked for any of it; and as, if she had not economised her butter, she generally crumbled half her slice, or left it on her plate, and at length ceased to ask for it, I at length discontinued having the loaf placed on table.

I should mention that, partly to oblige a worthy tradesman, partly to oblige ourselves, we had taken a teacher—a Miss Dixon. She was a very methodical, quiet girl—not very bright, but very reliable—who, in re-quital for her gratuitous instruction in certain accomplishments, saved my sisters much fatigue by taking an English class of the younger girls, besides making herself generally useful. I believe her grand object was to sing like

Jacintha, of which there was very little prospect, for her voice was like that of a mouse in a cheese.

Well, we made a capital start this "half." Everybody was energetic, everybody was in good spirits: everybody seemed ready to say, "Charming, charming! — delightful, delightful!"

I remember, one warm summer's morning, I had a visit from old Miss Pope, who was accompanied by a tall, spare niece, of about thirty-five years of age, who had been teacher in a school. Good Miss Pope was benevolently anxious to know that her little goddaughters, the Duncans, did not give much trouble, and hoped we did not find ourselves overworked.

"Oh, no," I said, "we all have plenty to do, but we get through it capitally, and sleep like tops when we go bed. Would you like to have a peep at the girls?"

"Dear me, yes, if it's not quite out of rule!" cried Miss Pope, rising and looking quite fluttered. "Melissa will be so pleased, I am sure," glancing at her niece, who looked unutterable things.

Nothing daunted, I crossed the hall, followed by my companions, and opened the door. Close to it, at a little work-table, were grouped the three heads of Mary Barnet and the Callenders, whose eyes seemed devouring their book. A little further on, in a lounging chair (with her feet crossed, I regret to say,) Fanny Ward, learning something or other, her face completely hidden by her pendent flaxen

locks, and her *pose* quite satisfactory to an artist, but not to a school teacher. At the large table, several girls drawing, superintended by Marian; two or three young ones at a distant window-seat with Miss Dixon; and one at the piano, practising a brilliant duet with Jacintha, who looked round at us, but did not leave off.

In another minute we had withdrawn; Miss Pope all smiles, and murmuring "pretty dears!" I enjoying a competent allowance of complacence, and Miss Melissa, stern and glum, evidently considering that everything in the schoolroom was "quite out of rule."

Jacintha, as I have observed, was energetic and in good spirits. These good spirits seemed to me very much sustained by frequent letters from Mrs. John Middlemass, which were conned, quoted, enjoyed, smiled over, pondered over, but burnt, and never shown. Up to this time, our letters had always been in common: I don't say whether it was a good plan or a bad plan, or whether it were a plan possible to observe when domestic relations and inner affections became more complicated; but that had been the plan hitherto. What one knew, all three knew, what gave joy or sorrow or mere amusement to one gave it to the rest: now, it was not so. Marian said softly to me one morning with a smile—

"Jacintha never shows her letters now."

And then looked sorry she had made the observation. We did not allude to it again; and I am sure Jacintha felt, and was glad of, our delicacy.

The secret persuasion of Marian and myself undoubtedly was, that there was a hero in the case ; but what sort of a hero we could very poorly make out. Mr. Mortlake's name occasionally transpired, but not in a very significant way, unless to people who were bent on making something out of nothing. Still my impression was that our sister-in-law, Laura, rallied Jacintha about him, kept up her interest in him by scraps of his sayings and doings, and perhaps congratulated her seriously on having evidently made a conquest, and that this was the source of the brightened eye and damask cheek. Else, why should she not have shown her letters ?

Jacintha was very popular among the girls. And yet she was down upon them directly when they transgressed, or fell short of her expectations : would speak short, and with a flashing eye. But few transgressed often except Margaret Forest, who decidedly was a tiresome girl, stubborn and rebellious. If the others had not been so good, she might have infected them.

Sometimes, at night, Jacintha would say to me, "That child, Margaret Forest ! what a toad she is ! She is determined to take her own way, and I am determined she shall not. That spirit must be broken : I will not be defied."

Then she would tell me some instance of her naughtiness, and end with joining me in laughing at it.

Marian had not forgotten our Moravian friend's account of her pupils' numerous school

feasts and gipsey parties. Sometimes she would emulate these, by taking all the girls to some farm-house or rural spot, where they would drink tea in the open air, after spending the afternoon in botanizing or sketching. I had found it expedient to keep a couple of cows; we already had a paddock and a stable, and I made an arrangement with a good sort of old man, our gardener, to look after them. Sometimes we had tea or curds-and-whey on our own bowling-green.

How easy it is to make children happy ! How simple their amusements and pleasures ! I have often been repaid by as bright and grateful a smile for a few sweet-pea seeds, a sheet of coloured note-paper, or a little scrap of ribbon or silk, *given at the right moment*, as I could have been for presents of great price.

On the second of Marian's holiday excursions, I was a little surprised by Mary Barret timidly requesting permission to remain with me.

"I am not a very good walker," said she, "and it will be *such* a pleasure if I may stay with you."

I looked at her doubtfully, for I had never before heard any complaint of her walking, but immediately granted her request, which I now incline to think, was made partly on my own account and partly on hers; for, when we were left to spend a long afternoon with one another, I found her shaking up my sofa cushions, arranging my shawl, and watching my looks "as a handmaiden wathcheth the

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eye of her mistress.” On the other hand, she made good use of her opportunity by tempting me into long and unreserved conversation ; telling me of all her little projects for the comfort of her father and the benefit of his household and parish ; and asking my advice on a good many really knotty points. In return, I drew out from her much about her home, her mother’s illness, and her father’s trials and fatigues, manfully borne, that greatly interested me. Now and then a quiet tear stole down the good girl’s cheek ; I pressed her hand, and she once kissed mine.

Dear Mary ! I believe we were both sorry when our colloquy ceased ; indeed, she said as much, and I felt it. But they were renewed from time to time, though not often. Her father could not spare her to us beyond Christmas.

CHAPTER X.

Serene will be our days, and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security !
And they a blissful course may hold
E'en now, who, not unwise bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Let seek thy firm support, according to their need.
Ode to Duty.

THUS, though we made no distinctions, we each had our favourite. Mary Barnet was mine and Jacintha's; Fanny Ward was Marian's. I liked Rose Callender, indeed, almost as much as Mary, but she was not so isolated, nor her position so interesting. She had a mother, father, and sister, in full health and prosperity. I never saw her shed, nor need to shed a tear: indeed, her affections, never much called forth, lay dormant; she was loving and kind, but not susceptible. Intellect, genius, were what she most admired in others and most desired for herself, and she was endowed with both, and with their indispensable handmaiden, industry. A more laborious, painstaking girl could not be found; she aimed at excellence for its own pure sake, while Mary Barnet sympathised, and Henrietta looked on in wonder.

The home-influences of these sisters were not favourable. Mrs. Callender, a bosom

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friend of Mrs. Forsyth's, was a thoroughly frivolous woman; and like many frivolous women, had a strong will and imperious temper. Having won her own husband by her beauty, and considering marriage the grand desideratum, her girls heard a great deal too much about beauty and fortune, and the comparative values of various accomplishments in the match-making market.

"You must leave off poking, Rose, or you'll never get married!" and similar threats were frequently uttered: and the wonder was that the girls were so little hurt by them.

"Rose has talents, and Rose's talents must be brought forward," said Mrs. Callender to me peremptorily, "for her father values them—and so do many men; and they enhance the value of beauty though they can't supply it. Rose is not plain, thank goodness! she has her father's eye, and her father's brow; but she will never have Henrietta's grace and elegance."

Jacintha's singing—(it is surprising how its fame had spread! in a great measure, doubtless, owing to Mrs. Forsyth's little parties)—had been Mrs. Callender's grand attraction to us; other, and, as she would class them, inferior attainments, she cared very little about. "She could quite rely on us—she was sure she might place confidence in any friends of Mrs. Forsyth's, only don't let Rose get into any poking ways, nor let Henrietta fatigue herself with too hard lessons."

To Mrs. Callender's recommendation (before she had had any experience of our deserts) we

owed Margaret Forest, who was also a West Indian, a motherless girl, alternately spoilt and neglected by her father, who was very glad to get her off his hands. Thus, Jacintha's application to Mrs. Forsyth had ultimately brought us three pupils; two of them very nice ones.

Week after week found us constantly, usefully, and cheerfully employed; and continual exclamations were made at the days growing short sooner than usual. The only real pain we received was from one or two communications from John, relating to my father, which were of a distressing nature. But there was nothing we could do, except pray for him; and that, I will venture to say, we all did. The thorn in our hearts kept us awake sometimes at night, but was hidden or unfelt by day.

At length, the Christmas holidays drew so near, that preparations for them were busily making. We were to have a gay breaking-up party; all the home-presents were to be exhibited on a Christmas-tree; show pieces were to be played, sung, and recited, and a French charade performed. The house was full of smiles, that continually broke into laughter: under that influence of cheerful expectation, how much was achieved! Jacintha and Marian quite revelled in their work, and the pleasures of their own approaching holiday sank into secondary consideration.

The grand day arrived: lessons were suspended, that various little preparations might be made; and while Marian and Miss Dixon were busied in the school-room, and I in my parlour, Jacintha went out to execute certain

important errands. I was alone with Hawkins, giving out sweetmeats, when she returned.

"Isabella!" said she hurriedly. I looked up, and instantly saw something was the matter.

"You can go, Hawkins," said I; "I will ring when I want you."

"What is it?" continued I, as soon as Hawkins had retreated; "you are ill, and as pale as death."

"Oh, I'm not ill!" gasped she; and the next instant her cheeks were like carmine. She turned her face away, and concealed it with her hand. "That is,—I'm *not* very well, I believe!"

"I will get you a glass of wine," said I, going to a side-table where Hawkins had just placed two full decanters, and a tray of our best glass. I filled a wine-glass, and carried it to her.

"Thank you!" and she gulped, rather than sipped a little. "It's so very foolish of me!" trying to laugh. "And all about nothing—only because I happened to see an acquaintance—only—" and her lip quivered.

I was *sure* of the name, and yet feared to name it.

"Only Mr. Mortlake," said she in a careless tone that was accompanied by a burning blush.

"Oh, indeed," said I, looking another way, and speaking quietly. "So you met him—"

"I can hardly say I met him," said Jacintha, loosening her bonnet strings and then her collar. "He drove past me, and our eyes happened to meet. I recognised him directly, and bowed, and *he* bowed too."

“Dear me!” cried I, “he will be calling here presently, doubtless. My dear Jacintha, he must have come here on purpose to see *you*!”

“Oh, nonsense, that can’t be,” said she, fluttered, and looking very pleased.

“Why not? Does he know anybody here?”

“Not that I am aware of—oh, perhaps he *may* call, just to—”

“Depend upon it, he will!—with some note from Laura, or message from John, just by way of excuse.”

“Excuse? Dear Isabella, why should he want an excuse?”

“Why, indeed?” cried I. “None is wanting, I’m sure; only he might be glad of one just by way of introduction. Dear me, how fortunate that he should come to-day of all others, when everything is in nice order!”

“Fortunate, indeed!” echoed Jacintha, starting up, all smiles. “And that reminds me I have a thousand things to do, and must set about them while I have time. If he calls before I am ready, *you* will receive him, Isabella.”

“To be sure I will,” said I, arranging myself a little at the glass; “and I’ll tell you what, Jacintha—I shall invite him to our party!”

“Just as you like!” cried she gaily, and, the next instant was gone. In a high state of pleasurable excitement, I set about preparing to receive my future brother-in-law.

There were many things yet requiring to be done—Hawkins was already tapping at the door.

"Come in, Hawkins," said I. I thought we would attack every difficulty at once, and then the bustle would be over.

"We shall want more sugar, ma'am, for the negus."

"Very well, Hawkins."

"And them little apples, ma'am, for the wassail-bowl—cook says they're a deal too small for roasting."

"The smaller the better, Hawkins. Crab-apples are the real thing."

"Are they to be sent up in a dish, ma'am?"

"Dear me, no! The spice must be tied in a bit of muslin, to be afterwards taken out, the eggs well beaten with the hot wine, and frothed with a chocolate mill—the apples put in the last thing, to float at the top."

"Certainly," said Hawkins, "if the apples is to be put in the tankard, the littler they are, the better."

"The tankard! No, no, Hawkins! not the silver tankard, but my grandfather's punch-bowl! We are not going to have a 'cool tankard,' but a wassail-bowl piping hot!"

"Then, if the young ladies is to partake of it, ma'am, I should say, a little water," suggested Hawkins.

"Well—perhaps a bottle of water to two bottles of wine," said I, reluctantly.

"Better be half-and-half, ma'am," remonstrated the prudent Hawkins. "Their little heads is no ways used to anything stronger than weak tea or coffee, and it would be a pity to make them ache, to-night of all nights in the year."

“Perhaps it had better be so,” said I; “but you must measure it carefully, and be sure you don’t make it *too* weak; and let there be plenty of sugar and spice and all that’s nice, and serve it very hot and frothy, with a silver ladle in it.”

“Then, ma’am, if you will please in the next place to remember the strawberry-jam for the stone-creams.”

“Hawkins, will you ask Miss Jacintha for her keys?” interrupted Marian, looking in.

“Marian! Come in!” cried I. And, the moment Hawkins was gone, “What do you think has happened?” said I, excitedly.

“I can’t think!” said Marian, surprised.

“Mr. Mortlake is come!”

“Mr. Mortlake?” repeated Marian, with a vivid blush. “Where is he?” in a subdued, eager voice.

“Doubtless he will be *here* soon. Jacintha saw him drive up the street!”

“And *he*—”

“He bowed!—*she* bowed!”

“Dear!—”

“He *can* but have come for one purpose.”

“To see her, do you mean?”

“And propose!”

“Oh, Isabella! you are surely jumping to conclusions too rapidly—you make my head spin!” cried Marian.

“Well,—I may be premature,” said I, cooling down a little, “but I think it will come to that at last; and I am sure she thinks so too.”

“What has she said?” inquired Marian, eagerly.

"She has told me to receive him for her if he comes before she has finished dressing; and when I boldly said I should invite him to come in the evening, she looked highly pleased."

"Nay, then, there must be something in it," said Marian. "You dear Jacintha! how well you look!" giving a hearty caress and kiss to Jacintha,—who just then entered, in very becoming demi-toilette,—and then leaving the room.

"*Do I look well?*" said Jacintha, smiling, and glancing at her reflection in the mirror. "I believe this French blue becomes me—it was a very kind present of John's. But, Isabella, there really are many things I *must* look to, come who may; therefore I think I had better see to them at once; and if any one calls, you can send for me, you know."

"Yes, yes; I'll send," said I, heartily—and she went off quite secure of her sisters' sympathy and co-operation.

Having completed my arrangements, I repaired to the drawing-room, and took up my show knitting, impatiently listening for the visitors' bell.

The dinner-bell rang instead. It was a disappointment. The girls gathered merrily round the table for their last dinner before breaking-up, and Jacintha, in brilliant looks, was yet a little fatigued and feverish. I saw her drink a tumbler of water with avidity, but she could not eat.

There was a great deal of chattering and laughing, but chiefly among the younger ones.

Mary Barnet was always quiet, even in her enjoyment, and she was thinking much more of our parting than of the Christmas-tree. A tear shone in her eye as she looked towards me.

Margaret Forest was surly at having no distinguished part to take in the proceedings of the evening, owing to her own idleness; and she scowled vindictively at Fanny and Emma, who tried to smooth her down. How we make or mar our own pleasant hours!

The afternoon was all hurry and bustle. It was an anxious one to me. I need not add, to Jacintha. Once, when I touched her hand, it was so burning!

“Do have a glass of wine,” said I.

“Of water you mean,” said she, going to the water carafe and pouring some into a tumbler. “Delicious! I’m quite restored now. Don’t look so concerned, Isabella. I’ve had a little disappointment, that’s all.” And she went away cheerily, though I know her heart was heavy.

Well,—no visitor came. Dressing-time arrived, and no visitor came. I arrayed myself in my best, the lamps were lit, the fires built up, the girls, in their best dresses, dropped in two or three at a time, smiling and gathering round me or dispersing about the room. Great expectations were formed of the Christmas-tree, which no one had yet seen but Jacintha and Marian, though all had contributed to its fruits: it was to burst on us, by and by, in all its glory.

Then our evening visitors began to arrive: Jacintha and Marian joined the circle, each,

to my partial eyes, looking very lovely. And Jacintha carried off her disappointment so well that it was difficult to believe she had had one.

Among our guests was Mrs. Meade. It was a singular event, her coming to an evening reception of ours, and we felt the compliment accordingly. I longed to sit beside her, and chat with her the whole evening. But that would never do ; we both knew it ; and she smiled and pressed my hand when I said something regretful about it, replying, "No, no ; you have other claims—we shall get a little chat by and by."

I trusted we should ; and I placed the Reverend Mr. Barnet beside her, knowing that two such good and sensible people must have topics in common. Nor was I mistaken ; I soon saw them in earnest conversation, that seemed alternately cheerful and serious ; and, though I could not hear a word, I caught an occasional tone, that I was sure bespoke mutual pleasure.

Mary Barnet was to return home with her father after supper. His vicarage was ten miles off, and they had a long, cold drive before them. Meanwhile she was playing and singing her best duets with Jacintha, and her father listening with gratified pride and affection in his eyes. Mrs. Meade was expressing her approval to him, I knew, from the little bow and smile he bestowed on her in return. Then Rose Callender played, and Mr. Barnet and Mrs. Meade quietly resumed their talking, not so as to interrupt. One girl exhibited her

proficiency after another; at length I heard Mr. Ward say to Marian—

“But, Miss Marian, we have not heard *your* voice to-night.”

“Oh, no!” said Marian, gaily; “I am not going to enrapture you this evening. I am going to light the tapers on the Christmas-tree!”

And, presently, the ringing of a small silver-toned bell was succeeded by the updrawing of a mysterious green curtain that hitherto had divided a certain portion of the room from the rest. It ascended majestically, forming into splendid festoons, and revealed to our delighted eyes the Christmas-tree, blazing with tapers, surmounted by a glorious star, and bearing on its sturdy branches sweetmeats, gilt walnuts, gay ribbons, purses, neck-ties, delicately worked sleeves and collars, and a variety of other handiworks, too numerous to mention. Jacintha played soft music: Mr. Ward clapped his hands, which was emulated by the rest till a noble round of applause was produced; and then all the company drew near the tree to investigate its decorations, and read with interest the names on the labels which announced to whom each gift was appropriated. Many found their own name, and exclamations of surprise and delight accompanied the removal of their presents from the tree.

While all but Mrs. Meade and myself were thus engaged, she, with a significant smile, placed herself beside me, and, again pressing my hand, said—

"Now, the time is come for our little chat. How nicely everything has gone off! What a gratifying evening this must be to you and your dear sisters! How pleasantly the girls have gone through their various little performances—so modestly, unaffectedly, and with such quiet self-possession! That excellent Mr. Barnet appears fully to appreciate the advantages his daughter has received here. He says she has sprung up from a girl into a young woman. He seems quite to reckon on her as the companion of his evenings, and his assistant in his multifarious duties."

"Mary is so good a girl," said I, "that I am persuaded he will not reckon on her in vain."

Here she came up to us, smiling, and said, "Miss Middlemass, there are so many things belonging to you hanging on the Christmas tree unclaimed!"

"Is it possible?" cried I, rising with secret reluctance; but Mary affectionately offered me her arm, and I could not hang back.

In another ten minutes I was again at Mrs. Meade's side.

"I tried," said she, smiling, "to bring a friend with me this evening, who would, I thought, be a not unpleasing addition to your circle; but, unfortunately, he could not be persuaded."

"Mr. Meade?" said I.

"No; a Mr. Mortlake."

"Mr. Mortlake!" I involuntarily repeated.

"An old acquaintance of my husband's, rather than of mine. He happened to be

passing through the town on business; called on his old friend, and lunched with us. He asked me if there were not some sisters of a friend of his, Mr. John Middlemass, here. I replied, Yes, and that I was going to join a breaking-up party at your house this very evening, and said that, as he was a friend of your brother's, I should have no hesitation in taking him with me, if he liked; but he suddenly turned very shy, and, after one or two inquiries, declined. I told him he was punishing himself, for I knew he would like you."

CHAPTER XI.

I seem like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted ;
Whose guests are fled,
Whose garlands, dead,
And all but he departed.

MOORE.

I WAS perplexed by this: there seemed a hitch somewhere.

“Jacintha saw Mr. Mortlake in passing,” said I, “so it is a pity he did not accompany you, for I think he is rather a favourite of my brother’s. Perhaps he will be more courageous to-morrow, when we are not so formidable a party.”

“Oh, no,” said Mrs. Meade, “he returned to town this afternoon.”

Here was a blow! She little knew she had given one; and went on to speak unconcernedly on other subjects. But, after all, what harm was done? Jacintha was disappointed of a pleasant visitor, and my little castle in the air, which Marian had told me was absurd, was demolished. But could not Mr. Mortlake pass through a town on business without exciting expectations? There was nothing in it—or, at least, there would have been nothing suspected, but for Jacintha’s evident emotion.

Even now I could see her glancing towards the door whenever it opened ; and I knew, or thought I knew, that she was seemingly occupied in one thing and really in another. I lost sight of her among a group, and in her place beheld the smiling, heart-whole Marian, pleasing and pleased, whatever she said, did, or looked, and followed by the loving eyes of several of her partial scholars.

“What a charming creature she is !” said Mrs. Meade, as if in answer to my thoughts. “ You are happy, my dear friend, in your sisters !”

Here Mrs. Cole sailed up to us, to congratulate me patronizingly on the performances that decorated the Christmas-tree ; and when I turned round, I found that Mrs. Meade had gone to examine it.

Supper followed, and then the party broke up. I accompanied Mary Barnet into the hall to receive her tearful farewell : her father warmly shook my hand, and hoped she might be privileged to consider me her friend for life. A good deal of time was lost, after the last guest had disappeared, before the prayer-bell could be rung, and we could gather soberly, and sleepily, in my morning-room, for our last evening family service. Some may say, why not send the poor tired children and servants to bed without prayers ? No, I would not do that : we had had a happy evening, a prosperous and profitable half-year ; many casualties might occur before we met, if we *ever* all met again. A few brief words of thankfulness, of entreaty for forgiveness of all past sins of

omission and commission, of continued grace and blessing, sent us all with chastened cheerfulness to our night's rest.

Jacintha said "good-night" directly after prayers, and I saw her no more. Soon the whole house was silent.

The next morning, while I was dressing, and turning many things in my mind, some one tapped at my door. I said, "Come in," and Jacintha entered in her dressing-gown, with a letter in her hand. Our letters were delivered the first thing in the morning: we could read them in our bedrooms.

"This is very singular, Isabella," said she, with a troubled air, and sitting down as she spoke: "here is a letter from Laura, who speaks of Mr. Mortlake coming here and certainly intending to see me."

"His heart must have failed him," said I. "Cheer up, he may come yet. He called on Mrs. Meade yesterday."

"On Mrs. Meade! And you never told me!"

"My dear Jacintha, how could I? You slipped off to bed the moment prayers were over."

"That's true. Do tell me what she said!"

"It was just when the Christmas-tree was first lighted up. She told me she had been very near bringing a friend with her uninvited, relying on our kind reception of him—a Mr. Mortlake."

"I wish she had!" cried Jacintha. "Why did not she?"

"He would not come—he said he must return to town."

"Stupid! tiresome! And did he?"

"Yes—she supposed so."

"Ah, well, there's no use worrying about it!" said she, giving a deep sigh. "'Men were deceivers ever.' There must be some strange vacillation in his character.—To think of Mrs. Meade's knowing him, all this while!"

"She knows very little of him; but he is an old acquaintance of her husband's."

"Does she like him?"

"She said she thought we should have found him an agreeable addition to our party."

"Ah! there can be no doubt about that," said Jacintha, with another deep sigh; and starting up, she hurried away.

It was a busy day, of course—people coming or going, till the last girl had departed. Then the housemaids swept away the litter of dust, ends of cord, bits of straw, crumpled sheets of brown paper, consequent on wholesale packing up, and we drew round a good fire in the drawing-room just as it was growing dusk, and established ourselves in our old places.

Jacintha was sadly out of spirits: Marian was cheerful and talkative: she and I had to sustain the conversation between us, for I would not damp her harmless mirth, and I hoped by degrees to cheer Jacintha.

We were all very tired; but we unanimously agreed that the half-year had been well got through, and might be looked back on with honest pride. Also the party of the previous evening had been a success, and had given much pleasure to all. Finally, I was full of hope that when our Christmas bills were paid, and our

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earnings duly received, we should find ourselves a handsome sum in pocket. On these pleasing subjects, and on various little incidents and traits of character, we chatted very much to our mutual satisfaction till we went to bed.

The next morning Jacintha suddenly entered my room without tapping. Her hair was hanging over her shoulders, and again a letter was in her hand.

“Oh, Isabella!” said she, almost wildly, “such news!” and, dropping into a seat, she burst into tears.

“My father!” exclaimed I.

“Oh no, no! Mr. Mortlake—” and she sobbed.

“What is it? what is the matter?” said Marian, pale as ashes, hastily entering and closing the door. Her room was on the same floor, and she had heard Jacintha’s entry and agitated voice.

“It’s all owing to that Mrs. Meade!” sobbed Jacintha, passionately. “That hateful woman!”

“Mrs. Meade!” repeated I, in amaze.

“Yes—she told him!”

“Told him what?”

“That—that we kept a school!”

“Oh, Jacintha! and had not *you*?” ejaculated Marian.

“How should I? Why should I? What concern was it of mine?—of his, I mean?” cried Jacintha with fiery eyes, and cheeks like scarlet.

“Even independent of truth,” said I, “how could you hope to conceal it from him?”

“I didn’t” (she was almost choking with tears of rage and grief); “there was no deception in the case. I neither told him one thing nor another. Was I to go about, saying ‘I keep a school’ to everybody I met in Guernsey?”

“No, certainly not; only—”

“Laura said there was no need whatever for him to know; and I thought the same. We did not know, then, it would come to anything serious. And, when it appeared more likely,” continued the weeping Jacintha, “I tried to get it out a thousand times, but I could not, and I knew it would come out somehow, and thought he might as well learn it from any one else as from me. Oh, this horrid school!”

“Does he, then, hate schools so much?” said Marian timidly.

“I rather suspect he more hates concealment,” said I, thoughtfully. “Depend on it, he has a noble character.”

“What signifies his noble character?” cried Jacintha. “It will never be anything to me!” and she cried bitterly.

“Tell us how all this has come about,” said I, taking her hand. “Is the letter from Mr. Mortlake?”

“Oh no, no! from Laura.” And she put it into my hand. Marian leant over my shoulder, and we both read it silently.

It was the first epistolary effusion of Mrs. Middlemass’s that I had seen, and I cannot say it heightened my opinion of her. In the first place, the handwriting was poor—and I am influenced by handwriting; secondly, even

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her orthography was not always correct ; thirdly, her style was inelegant. Moreover, style is the voice of thought ; and the thoughts and feelings expressed by my sister-in-law were very unsatisfactory. All these conclusions I arrived at, by the way, while rapidly possessing myself of the facts in her letter. Stripped of much flimsy verbiage they were these :—Mr. Mortlake had, as Laura had often assured her dear Jacintha, admired Jacintha from the very first. He was a cool, reflective man, and would not offer his hand till he saw his way clearly before him. Then he went to Mrs. Middlemass (who acknowledged, or rather boasted that she had never allowed him to forget his interest in Jacintha), and told her he was coming down to Bayford.

“As he was close, I was close,” wrote Mrs. John. “As he said nothing about his interest in you, I said nothing about the school. Of course, as *you* had not, it was no affair of mine. Let the man find it out for himself when he could ! Well, he went down, he saw you in the street, he went to his friend (I cannot call her *your* friend) Mrs. Meade, told her he was going to call on you, and what must she do but blurt it out that you kept a school ; *had* kept one for some time—even before he first saw you in Guernsey ! What does Mr. Mortlake do, but turn sulky on the spot, give up his intentions, post up to London, and then come and upbraid *me*, of all creatures in the world, with having kept him in the dark ! And when I said it was no affair of mine, and after all, where was the harm ?—he said, *no* harm, in

keeping a school, but great harm in your having concealed it, and that it so altered his opinion of your character, and I don't know what all, that the illusion was dispelled, and he no longer felt you to be worth the seeking."

"Ah, I feared that was it," murmured I.

"Then I know how far you have read!" said Jacintha, rousing up. "Oh, *don't* you pity me?" And she threw herself into my arms.

"Most sincerely, my dear Jacintha." And I pressed her to my heart. Marian's tears were *her* only answer.

"Oh, *don't* you think I have been hardly used?"

"Severely punished, I must own, my poor, dear sister."

"Nay, unjustly used! cruelly used! Oh, that abominable Mrs. Meade!"

"Hush, Mrs. Meade has had nothing to do with it."

"Mrs. Meade has had *everything* to do with it! I shall consider that woman my worst enemy as long as I live! So spiteful! so *mean*!"

"Jacintha, you are quite wrong. Mrs. Meade told me, quite innocently, what had passed, and her relation bore much more the air of truth than Laura's. She is not a woman to *blurt* things out, as Laura vulgarly expresses it. On the contrary, with the kindest intentions, she invited her husband's friend to accompany her to a school feast, merely for the purpose of giving him a pleasant evening, without even knowing, up to that time, that he was acquainted with a family of the name of

Middlemass; and when he said he was, and questioned her about us, to be sure we were that family, her suspicions were still unaroused, and she merely thought him shy and unsociable. You yourself, on hearing of her invitation to him, said you wished he had accepted it. *Had* he done so, the truth must at once have become known to him, even had he been ignorant of it before."

"Oh that he had but come!" interrupted Jacintha, clasping her hands in anguish. "A look—a smile—a tear—and all would have been forgiven. *All?* So trivial a fault!—so harmless, so natural a concealment, to blight one's prospects for life? Oh, it is too, too hard!"

And, with a fresh burst of passionate grief, she started up and quitted the room.

Marian and I looked at one another in sorrow.

"It is a bitter disappointment," said I, "and the worst of it is that it has been her own fault. How differently you behaved with regard to Mr. Francis Duncan! Oh, Marian! let this be a lesson to you—nay, to us both! to us all!—never to be insincere, even in matters apparently trivial."

Marian sighed deeply. She did not need the monition, for she was candour itself.

When we reassembled at breakfast, Jacintha's eyes were red, and she hardly spoke. She remained inconsolable all day. She could not even make up her mind to call on her friend, Mrs. Forsyth. She wrote a long letter to Laura, I conclude, in her own room, and posted it herself. All the evening she was

silent and unsociable. The next day she was excessively cross: inveighed much against Mrs. Meade, said testy things to Marian and me, and was harsh to the servants. I was very glad that Marian was engaged to spend the evening with the Wards, though Jacintha told her she lowered herself by doing so, and disgraced her connexions. The idea of Marian being a disgrace to any one!

The dear girl took it very meekly. She knew exactly to what to attribute it, and made allowance. Previously to the breaking-up John had very kindly invited Marian to spend the holidays at his house, and Marian had declined, knowing how gladly Jacintha would fill her place, and affirming (with perfect truth, I am convinced,) that she cared very little for town gaieties, and preferred being with me. John did not press the point, but immediately transferred his invitation to Jacintha, who gladly accepted it.

Now, however, affairs were changed. In answer to Jacintha's impetuous letter, came a very cool one from Laura, saying that, fault or no fault, it was no good to repent what had been done now, or to throw blame on any one: the thing was done and could not be undone; and it would be fruitless for Jacintha to buoy herself up with hopes of setting things straight by coming to town, for Mr. Mortlake had gone to Paris. Jacintha was hurt at Laura's supposing she was buoying herself up by any hopes of the kind, and thought her saying so was indelicate and unfeeling. In short, all the

prestige of the London visit was gone—she resolved not to go, and wrote to say so. Mrs. Middlemass, no whit chagrined, invited two of her own sisters instead, who were, she said, dying to spend the winter in London. Thereafter, letters to and from Mrs. Middlemass were much less frequent.

Care fed on Jacintha's damask cheek. She must have been very deeply attached to this man, for whom, though I had never seen him, this occurrence had inspired me with great respect. She became morose, captious, and with frequent attacks of low spirits. I don't believe she disburthened her mind to Mrs. Forsyth; she paid her frequent visits, however, and this seemed the only thing that gave her pleasure during the holidays. But Mrs. Forsyth was less a favourite than of old: probably she had taken up some newer favourite to be the attraction to her select parties. Jacintha was only asked to two of them, and each time to meet people whom she knew were in Mrs. Forsyth's second-best set; moreover, she took it into her head that she was asked for the sake of her voice, and that Mrs. Forsyth assumed a higher tone to her than formerly. She returned displeased with her treatment, and declared that she would refuse Mrs. Forsyth's next invitation. But another invitation never came: which did not improve Jacintha's temper or spirits.

In short, our Christmas holidays were clouded. Jacintha cared very little for what gaiety came in her way, and yet complained

of monotony with irritation. Marian took what offered in the way of recreation, but her resources were within herself, and she could always be quietly happy, if free from anxiety concerning those she loved. That was not quite the case now; for her efforts to enliven Jacintha fell flat, though she did not on that account abandon them.

CHAPTER XII.

Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful Winter in.

COWPER: *The Task.*

JACINTHA was buried in the depths of a luxurious easy-chair—buried also in gloomy thought; Marian was intently manufacturing some wonderful creation of her own; while I, pen in hand, and with certain business-like files and tradesmen's books around me, was immersed in profound calculations.

“How much,” said I at length, leaning back and drawing a deep breath, “how much do you suppose we have cleared this half-year?”

“A hundred pounds,” said Marian, at random.

“Marian!—You absurd child!”

“Two hundred then,” said Jacintha, recklessly.

“Worse and worse!” cried I.

“Worse!” repeated Jacintha. “Have we not then even cleared a miserable hundred pounds?”

“We have exactly paid our expenses.”

Marian raised her eyes from her work. Jacintha started to her feet. I never saw any one look so aghast.

"Do you mean," said she, in a voice trembling with suppressed indignation, "that we have had all the fag, worry, and disgrace of this wretched school without being one penny into pocket?"

"Be calm, my dear Jacintha: there is no disgrace attaching to this school; on the contrary, it has won for us consideration and commendation sufficient of themselves to repay us for our trouble."

"That is quite true," assented Marian, in an under tone.

"The idea!" exclaimed Jacintha, exasperated; "the idea of all this hideous toil and trouble to no good!"

"No good?"

"Why, you say we have not cleared a penny!"

"True, but we have paid our way. You forget that had we not kept a school, or done something equivalent to it, we could not have paid our way. We must have been John's pensioners."

"That's true," said Jacintha in a softened tone. "But oh!—to have had all this toil and care, this ceaseless strain on mind and body, this wear of temper and spirits, this blighting of earthly prospects—and for no reward—only mere daily bread! It *is* hard!"

She covered her face with her hands. I knew she was silently weeping. I grieved; but what could I say?

"Perhaps you have made some mistake, Isabella," said Marian. "People do, sometimes."

"Certainly they do," said I; "but I am afraid I have made none here. Run over the figures yourself."

Marian took the paper, and went over the calculation once, twice—thrice.

"Yes," said she, looking up with her sweet smile, "I would not say so till I had gone over it three times. You have made a mistake of just forty pounds."

"Forty pounds!" repeated Jacintha, laughing in spite of herself. "That makes a world of difference!"

"Upon my word, I'm very glad of it," said I.

"Glad? Yes; but, my dear Isabella, what a miserable reckoner you must be!"

"Well, we are all liable to mistakes. Perhaps Marian has made one."

"Do give me the paper, Marian!" said Jacintha, stretching out her hand.

"I can easily see where Isabella made the mistake," said Marian apologetically, as if the blunder were her own, or she had taken a great liberty in finding it out.

Jacintha contracted her brows, but made no answer till she, too, had gone over the account three times.

"Yes!" said she, clearing up; "Marian is right enough. You abominable Isabella, to give me such a fright! I was just going to tell you it was no more than might have been expected, from your luncheon cakes, your

French rolls, your junkettings, and your extravagances of all sorts."

"It is well, then, you did not," said I, with complacence.

"Just so; but, while we are on the subject, do you really think, my dear Isabella, your housekeeping may not be too liberal?"

"With a residue of forty pounds the first half?" said I, triumphantly.

"The first three-quarters. We began, you know, at Easter."

"Still, if it were for the twelvemonth, it would be no bad balance."

"Hum—I don't know."

"Oh no, Jacintha, the comforts of the school-room must be attended to. I can't pinch the girls, or set distasteful things before them. I would sooner keep school ten years the longer. We were once girls ourselves."

"At no such very distant date, surely, Miss Isabella!" said Jacintha.

"Oh, it's long, long ago," said Marian with mock dolefulness. "I'm sure I feel quite decrepid."

"Well, we shall certainly not dub Isabella Professor of Arithmetic if she live to the age of Methusaleh!" said Jacintha laughing.

I was so glad to hear her laugh like her old self!

No pupil had offered to supply Mary Barnet's place. We therefore recommenced with eleven.

School-keeping revealed more of its harder features this half-year. It was a bitterly cold

January ; early rising was all the more trying to those who loved their warm beds ; and Jacintha had always been one of them. She used to come down, looking pinched, cold, and too often cross : and crossness in principals always re-acts on subordinates. I now and then heard peevish tones. Moreover, one or two girls were generally on the sick list with colds, sore-throats, tooth-ache, and chilblains. We were afraid that a bad swelled face would prove a case of mumps ; but luckily it was not ; and though Hawkins and I had plenty to do in the way of coddling, we as yet kept the doctor out of the house.

But a very unpleasant thing occurred, that perplexed and harassed us sadly. Two or three small thefts were committed, and we could not detect the culprit. One girl missed a silver pencil-case ; another a scent-bottle ; another a small fruit-knife ; and though Jacintha accused the losers of carelessness, and was sure their losses must have been owing to their own negligence or forgetfulness, she did not think so when she missed a vinaigrette of her own that had been given her by Mrs. Middlemass.

“ This is going too far ! ” said she with decision. “ A search must be made.”

A search was accordingly made, in all the bedrooms and sitting-rooms, to no purpose. Hawkins then came forward and begged that it might extend to the servants’ rooms, as she said they were much hurt at being suspected.

In vain I assured her that I did not suspect them : she said Miss Jacintha did, which was as bad ; and, as Jacintha did not deny it, my

saying so went for nothing. Jacintha accepted the challenge, and then repented of it, leaving the search half made. No good came of this investigation, but some harm ; the maids did not consider themselves cleared, and there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction and distrust. Even Hawkins, though she said little, had a look of discontent.

Then Margaret Forest, that disagreeable child ! said she had not, nor ever *had* had enough to eat. Again the household loaf was placed on the table ; and again she crumbled and wasted the bread. Again, therefore, the loaf was not brought up.

The day that it ceased to be placed on the table was a memorable one for a more important reason. As Emma Grove stood beside Jacintha at the head of her class, she drew out her handkerchief from her pocket, and with it, unwittingly, Jacintha's vinaigrette, which fell on the floor !

“What’s this ?” cried Jacintha in amaze. Emma, seeing the vinaigrette, coloured like scarlet—then became deadly pale.

“Stand back, young ladies !” cried Jacintha. “You all see what it is ! You all saw where it came from ! Miss Dixon, go and call Miss Middlemass !”

All stood transfixed. Miss Dixon came to me with the longest face I ever saw, and in a lugubrious voice, said, “You’re wanted, ma’am, in the school-room, please !”

I saw directly that something was the matter, and repaired thither without a word. The first thing I saw was Marian’s perturbed face—then

Jacintha, standing in a commanding attitude, the girls all looking uncomfortable around her.

"Isabella!" cried Jacintha, in a raised voice, "here's my vinaigrette come to light at last! Where do you think it was? In Emma Grove's pocket!"

"You don't think I knew it was there, Miss Middlemass!" cried Emma, bursting into tears.

"I don't think you meant to draw it out with your handkerchief, certainly," said Jacintha, with cutting emphasis.

"Oh, hush, hush!" said I, taking the sobbing girl by the hand. "Jacintha, the pursuits of the morning must not be interrupted for this. I take Emma in charge, and reserve the matter for private inquiry."

"As you will," said Jacintha, speaking quickly. "For my part I think publicity would be the only justice to all."

I led her away, without answering, into my room. I sat down on my sofa: Emma stood weeping beside me.

"Come, my dear, tell me all," said I softly, and taking her hand.

"All? But there's nothing to tell!" cried Emma, indignantly. "Search me! examine all my things!" And she hurriedly emptied her pocket into my lap. Among its contents, our eyes at the same moment fixed on the pencil-case! and then on each other. We both looked appalled.

"Somebody must have put these things in my pocket!" exclaimed Emma.

"There must be some great wickedness somewhere," said I, looking steadfastly at

her. "Why should anybody do such a cruel thing?"

"I can't imagine!" cried Emma. "I do not know that I have an enemy."

There was such innocence in her every look and tone that I never for a moment suspected her. I was greatly troubled.

"Now, Emma," said I, "you must see that this places us in a very unpleasant position."

"It places *me*!" said Emma.

"All of us," rejoined I; "because, though I cannot for an instant do you the injustice to believe you guilty, I cannot, for the present, treat you as if you were innocent."

"Oh, Miss Middlemass!"

"No, Emma. Consider, my dear, how we are placed."

"Consider how *I* am placed, please!" cried she, weeping afresh.

"I do, I do. I hope and trust you will come forth from the ordeal without a speck of discredit, but till the guilty party is detected, the shadow of the guilt lies on you; and, for the sake of common justice, we must deal with you in some respects as we would with the lowest person in the house, till—"

"Oh, send me home, please!" interrupted Emma, sobbing; "send me home!"

At this moment we were joined by Jacintha, whose eye instantly darted on the pencil-case.

"Ha!" cried she snatching it up, and looking eagerly at it, "what is this?"

Her eye, as she spoke, fixed piercingly on Emma, who immediately seemed turned into

stone. She saw Jacintha suspected her, and from that moment became silent, stubborn, and impenetrable.

I cannot go over that scene. It affects me too much. I can never bear to think of it. What tears it has often cost me in the silent watches of the night!

Suffice it to say, that Jacintha was absolutely convinced that Emma Grove was the culprit, and inflexibly resolved to make her suffer as such—at least as far as common opinion and separation from her companions went; that Marian implored, and I insisted, that Mr. Grove (who was a widower) should be instantly requested to remove his daughter from our house. But twenty-four hours necessarily passed before he could do so; during which time I had Emma constantly in my charge by night as well as day. And as I could not possibly undertake two offices at once, all the searching, examining, questioning, &c., that went on for the purpose of throwing some light on this most painful matter, had to be gone through out of my presence, by my sisters. How they conducted it, I know not; I only know their trouble was fruitless, and that Jacintha, alas! spoke and acted far too much as if it were beyond question that Emma Grove was a hardened criminal.

It had a bad effect on the whole house. I could hear a great deal of subdued, eager talking in the kitchen, though I had given Hawkins a hint to check gossip on the subject as much as she could. The girls were of

course in a high state of excitement, and most of them, if not all, very indignant at Emma's being suspected, though *who* the guilty party could be, none could divine, or, at any rate, would not divulge. Everything was done with divided attention: all minds were pre-occupied with the one subject. In fact, how could they be otherwise?

As for Emma she cried herself to stone, and then maintained a dogged silence. I am sure the poor child lay awake half the night, for I could hear her softly using her handkerchief under the bedclothes. At length, quite worn out, she slept heavily—which was more than I could.

During the ensuing long, long morning, I gave her some plain needlework to do, and applied myself to the same occupation in melancholy silence, only now and then addressing her in such language as, I thought, must touch her heart, whether innocent or guilty. At length she quickly said, "Oh, don't, please!" in such a piteous accent, that I desisted.

Late in the afternoon a fly drove rapidly up to the door, and Mr. Grove alighted from it. He was in a towering passion, though but imperfectly acquainted with the details of the case; and his anger did not diminish when his poor girl, usually so undemonstrative, threw herself into his arms and sobbed on his bosom. He would hear nothing; he would only storm at us all round, in no measured terms, and, as Emma's box was already packed, it was soon placed on the fly, and they drove

away in it a few minutes after his arrival: Jacintha to the last preserving her attitude of defiance, and I vainly reiterating my hopes that all would yet be cleared up satisfactorily.

One might almost have thought a death had occurred in the house, so mournful a stillness ensued. We ate our evening meal almost in silence; those who did not look sorry, looked dull or cross.

When we reassembled for prayers I opened my Bible, but, before reading it, said—

“Night is coming on—how hushed and still! But there will be some aching hearts beneath this roof to-night. Darkness does not descend on us, as it has so often done before, on a peaceful, cheerful family. A great sin has been committed; and as a loving, well-ordered family resembles the different members of a body under one head, one member of which cannot suffer without its being felt by the individual in whom all those members are united, so, with us, the sorrow of one is the sorrow of all; nay, in some respects, the shame of one is felt as the shame of all, till the disgrace can be effaced. Let us all then make common and fervent intercession for the unhappy person who has committed the great sin which now weighs so heavily on our hearts; bearing strongly in mind that each and all of us are sinners before Almighty God, however clear we may be of this particular offence, and that there is no hope for any one of us but through Him whose blood cleanseth from *all* sin.”

Then I read one of the shortest penitential

psalms, and then prayed. Marian, Henrietta Callender, and Hawkins silently wept. I know not if any one else did. All went off to their beds, serious and subdued ; Marian accompanying them. Jacintha remained to talk with me. She was still very hot about it ; and could not give up her belief in Emma's guilt, though she said she was the last girl in the school of whom she could have supposed it.

“ Those quiet girls !—it is always they who require the most watching.”

I did not believe this to be a true axiom. I had been a quiet girl myself. Still, the heart is desperately wicked—who shall know it ? save Him who made it. But my impression was, that Emma was innocent, whether she could ever be proved so or not. In this impression my arm had instinctively twined round her as she lay sleeping beside me in the night ; and when I awoke in the morning from the brief but dreamless slumber that at length had given me a little rest, I had seen her gazing on me with such a wistful, piteous, look, that, though she closed her eyes the next moment, it sank into my heart.

I did not mention this little incident to Jacintha, but I did to Marian, who came down and had a long talk with me after Jacintha had gone to bed ; and she was comforted by it, and said, “ Oh, I am so glad she woke and found your arm round her ! I am so very, very sorry Jacintha is so harsh, for I am sure Emma is innocent.”

“ Who, then, can be the offender ? ” said I.

“ That I cannot imagine,” said Marian,

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sadly. "I have talked to every one of the girls, seriously and separately, and I have since talked to every one of the servants. Each seems as guiltless as the others. It is a great mystery." And, sighing, she kissed me and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

These, shall the fury passions tear,
The vultures of the mind—
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame, that skulks behind.
The stings of Falsehood those shall try,
And hard Unkindness' altered eye.
GRAY : *Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College.*

I REMAINED sitting by myself an hour or more, till I sat the fire quite out. With a heavy heart I then arose: an indefinite feeling of insecurity made me resolve to go over the house.

Painfully, slowly, and noiselessly, I descended the kitchen stairs. Jacintha usually looked to the fastenings, but to-night she had been pre-occupied, and had neglected to do so. Every key was turned, however, every bolt drawn; but on entering the kitchen I perceived a smell of burning. A stone or piece of slate had exploded in the fire in the course of the evening, and a fragment of it had lain unperceived on the floor, one of the boards of which was just catching fire. I closed the door to exclude the draught, and lifting a heavy can of water, which under ordinary circumstances would have been beyond my strength, I poured its contents on the board till all was safe, without much minding the

condition in which the servants would find the floor in the morning.

I have always been very thankful for this escape. Surely there is frequently something providential in these inward monitions of danger, that behoves us to look about us with more than ordinary circumspection. Had I not yielded to mine, we should probably have all been burnt in our beds: an impenitent sinner among the rest.

Having seen that all was safe, I regained the upper floor panting; and sat down for a minute or two, clasping my hands in silent thanksgiving. Then I resumed my survey, noiselessly pacing the carpeted gallery on which the bedrooms opened; and as I did so, I bethought me of the Moravian vigils, who keep watch throughout the night in their large schools, silently moving along the corridors, or spending the long hours in reading and prayer.

On opening the first door I startled poor Miss Dixon, who was just rising from her knees at her bedside. I put my finger on my lips and quietly withdrew, sorry I had disturbed her.

In the next room, all were sleeping—one moaning in her sleep. I screened the light from their eyes and stole away. The moonlight was streaming through the tall uncurtained window at the end of the gallery. I paused for a little, and looked out on our little garden and orchard, the dark spectral shadows of the trees broken by streaks of the white, ghastly light.

There was only one other room to visit—it was on the other side of the gallery, next to Jacintha's and opposite Miss Dixon's. Now that Emma was gone, only two girls slept in it—Alice Bicknell and Margaret Forest.

As I opened the door, I started violently on seeing a little white figure standing beside Alice's bed. The child started too, as if electrified, when the light of my night-lamp streamed in upon her; and dropping something from her left hand, which proved to be Alice's dress, that had been neatly folded on the chair, she hastily flung from her right some small hard substance that fell against the fender with a click. At the same time, the hard, dark, deep-lined face of Margaret Forest was turned towards me with a look, the expression of which I shall never forget; and she sprang into her bed, and buried herself under the bedclothes.

I uttered a shrill cry of "Jacintha!" and setting down my lamp, hurried to the child, whose hand I perceived in quest of something under her pillow. I turned back the pillow and caught her closed hand by the wrist; her fingers were too firmly fixed for me to be able to unclasp them; but Jacintha and poor Miss Dixon were already at my side, and between Jacintha and Margaret ensued a silent, deadly struggle. I was turning quite faint, when, the next instant, Jacintha triumphantly held up the smelling-bottle with one hand, and held down Margaret with the other.

"Miss Dixon," said I, hardly able to command my voice, "see what lies beside the fender."

Miss Dixon looked about, and almost immediately picked up the fruit-knife, which she brought to me with a look of dismay. Poor Alice, half awake, sat up in her bed, looking round her in perplexity, not unmixed with fear.

“That completes the chain—the only link wanting!” exclaimed Jacintha. “How did you know it was there, Isabella?”

“When I entered the room she flung it there. She was in the act of putting it into Alice’s pocket.”

“Into my pocket? Oh the wicked creature!” cried little Alice, springing out of bed and coming close up to me.

“You detestable girl!” cried Jacintha, pressing her hand strongly down upon her.

“You’re hurting me!—oh! oh!” roared Margaret.

“I don’t care if I am,” said Jacintha: “it is of no use biting me, Margaret; if you behave like a mad child you must be treated like one.”

Suddenly Margaret released herself from her grasp, and made a rush at the door, but Jacintha instantly had her arms round her from behind, pinioning Margaret’s to her side, as she victoriously carried her back to her bed, in spite of being unmercifully kicked all the while.

“I am quite competent to the charge of this young fury,” said she with determination. “Alice, my dear, I will trouble you to go to bed in my room—you and I will change quarters for to-night. Go, dear, go—go,

Isabella. Just look in on Marian, and if she is awake, tell her the missing things are found, and with whom. That poor, dear, injured Emma! I will go myself to Heatherton to-morrow, and tell her how completely she is cleared. I owe it to her. But we must get rid of this bad girl first. Good-night, good-night! Nothing can be done now."

I felt this was the case, and also that a wakeful night's quiet thought would prepare us for the busy action of the morrow. Margaret, even before we left the room, curled herself up like a centipede under the bedclothes. Jacintha locked the door the moment we had passed through it, and we left her alone in her glory. For she was fond of bending a stubborn will to her own.

I remained a minute or two outside, till I found all was still. In fact, Jacintha afterwards told me Margaret shammed going to sleep directly, and never spoke another word. Of course no child *could* sleep directly under such circumstances. Poor innocent Emma could not!

Miss Dixon was trembling like a leaf, and very cold, for she was only in her thin night-dress. I begged her to return to bed immediately, and offered to bring her a glass of wine.

"Oh no, ma'am, thank you," replied she expressively, "it's only the flurry that makes me feel rather satirical" (hysterical, she meant.) "I shall get over it directly. How fortunate it was, ma'am, that you found all out!"

"May I sleep with Miss Dixon?" said the trembling little Alice.

“ You may sleep with *me*, love, if you will.”

“ Oh, thank you !”

And in another minute, the little creature was nestling in my bed. Meantime, I went softly to Marian’s door, but it was bolted: all was quiet within, and I rejoiced that the night’s rest she so much needed would not be broken.

I lay down beside my little companion, who could not immediately compose herself to sleep, but was eager to repeat how very wicked it had been of Margaret to try to make her appear a thief, and how glad she was I had prevented it.

“ We are not worst at once, dear,” said I. “ Margaret perhaps stole these trinkets from the mere wish of possessing them, without thinking of the consequences. She has never known a dear mamma’s care.”

“ Nor has Emma !”

“ No, but Emma has been carefully brought up; has early been taught to know right from wrong, and not only to *know* what is right, but to practise it. I felt persuaded all along, that she *could* not have done this wicked thing; but appearances were so very much against her, that we should not have been justified in allowing her to associate with her companions here, and it was therefore best she should go home.”

“ Yes, but how unhappy she must have been !” said Alice, sighing.

“ She had at least the comfort of an approving conscience; and with that, I would sooner have been her than Margaret undetected.”

“ Oh yes ! so would I,” cried Alice.

“ But Margaret,” continued I, “ has had

very little pains bestowed on her moral and religious training, although her disposition is such as more than ordinarily to require it. If great pains are not bestowed on her, Alice, and if she does not take very great pains with herself, Margaret will, I fear, be a very unhappy character, and the source of great unhappiness in others."

"She's quite old enough," said Alice indignant, "to know the commandment 'thou shalt not steal!'"

"But to know a commandment and to be restrained by it are two very different things," said I. "How many of us know the commandment 'thou shalt not covet,' without being restrained by it!"

"Yes," said Alice sleepily. And if I had sought to make her eyelids close by the most effectual soporific, I could not have better done so than by preaching a little.

In the morning, while Alice still slept, I went into Marian's room. She had already unlocked her door, and was lying with her eyes thoughtfully fixed on a Carlo Dolce engraving on the opposite wall.

"Isabella!" exclaimed she surprised, "is anything the matter?"

"Yes," said I, sitting down beside her, "the thief is found out."

"Who?" cried Marian.

"Margaret Forest."

"Oh how thankful I am that Emma is cleared!" and she clasped her hands and looked upwards. "But Margaret, that unhappy child! what could induce her? how has

she been able to conceal it all this time? How has it been found out?"

She listened with intense interest while I told her. An angel could not have shown profounder sorrow and compassion at another's sin.

"She must go," said Marian, sighing deeply; "it will not do to retain such a companion for the others. Oh, that Mr. Grove may allow Emma to come back! Isabella, do let me ask him! Let *me* go to Heatherton instead of Jacintha! I think it will be the wiser plan. She is very irritable just now; I shall be more conciliating."

"Jacintha has nothing to irritate her *now* with the Groves, and is anxious to make reparation for her hastiness. You know, Marian, there is something generous, even noble, in her character when circumstances call it forth."

"I hope they may call it forth now, then," said Marian wistfully, "for it is fearful to me to see how stern and unyielding she can be. Where can Margaret be sent? Her father is never fixed anywhere; he is probably in his London chambers: her holidays were spent at Mrs. Callender's—I suppose she must go there."

"Yes," said I, "and I hope Mrs. Callender may view the matter in a right light, and see that we cannot help it; but she is a spoilt, violent-tempered woman, though an indolent one. She will very likely take up a strong prejudice against us, and bemoan Margaret as an injured innocent whom we have maligned."

"How *can* she, with such proofs?"

"True—but yet—I think I should like to go to her myself."

"Oh, Isabella! it would be too hazardous to you, to undertake such a journey in this cold weather! Write, if you will, but let *me* go to her."

"Well, we must consult Jacintha—I will go to her now."

"And I will dress as quickly as I can."

I found Jacintha carrying on a sort of judicial inquiry, with no success. Margaret was resolutely taciturn, and looked obstinate. As we knew how obstinate she could be in matters of comparative unimportance, it did not surprise us that she should now be "mute of malice," to avoid criminating herself. One or two admissions, however, she had incautiously made, and the ill-will she betrayed towards Emma, whom she seemed to hate for being always above her in their class, strengthened the case against her, though it required no addition. As Margaret was now altogether contumacious, refusing even to dress or wash herself, Jacintha turned the key upon her and withdrew with me into Marian's room, where we discussed what was to be done. Marian urgently begged to be allowed to go to Mr. Grove and Mrs. Callender, but Jacintha, who was very feverish, had taken up the idea that she owed it to Mr. Grove and Emma to exculpate the latter in person, and make personal confession of having been wrong; and with regard to Mrs. Callender, she summarily expressed her conviction that Marian was no match for her at all, and that she alone would

know how to represent the matter to her. Though Marian's judgment, in my opinion, was to be depended on quite as much as Jacintha's or mine, Jacintha had a way of always setting it aside because she was the youngest, whereas she by no means deferred to mine because I was the eldest. In short, Jacintha had always a will of her own, and in this affair it was rather too manifest that she had also "a temper :" at least what is commonly implied by the expression to mean just the reverse. The end was, that Marian and I, as usual, gave way ; that Jacintha, with her most resolute air, sent for a fly, dressed herself with taste, made a hearty breakfast, desired Miss Dixon and Hawkins to pack Miss Forest's trunk and carry her her breakfast ; and then, just as *our* usual breakfast-time had arrived, the fly came to the door, the trunk was placed on the box, Margaret Forest marched down stairs between her two attendants, and cried out—"Good-by ! I'm so glad I'm going ! Ha, ha, ha!"—and then scrambled into the fly, followed by Jacintha in great majesty.

I said a little, but not much, when our shrunken party sat down to our breakfast. Lecturing was out of place, where each heart could draw so obvious a moral from such a simple lesson. A few words—a sigh—and the subject was tacitly dropped. The meal was a dull one, and all seemed glad to go to lessons. In Jacintha's absence I took her class : it was a pleasure to me ; I am naturally fond of imparting what little I know to the young, and probably because it *is* little, I have rather

a faculty for doing it easily and with pleasure to my pupils. Thus, we all liked our task, independent of being glad to take refuge in it from a tendency to low spirits. The afternoon proved rainy; but a deplorable case of destitution coming to my knowledge, I proposed to the girls that we should all work as hard as we could for the poor family till dusk, and that they should, on the following day, have the privilege of bestowing their work on them themselves. This pleased all; I soon mustered old pieces and fragments enough to set all fingers to work, while I myself found abundant employment in contriving and cutting out. For some time, the work itself required thought as well as industry, but when it was fairly in train, so that it could be pursued mechanically, I proposed that some one should read aloud. Marian chose an amusing book, and many a merry laugh was heard as the reading proceeded.

Jacintha did not return till late at night, just as the girls were going to bed. I had a blazing fire and a hot dish or two ready for her, and she came in looking cold and fagged enough to demand all my little attentions. The very tone of her voice in the hall, as she desired Hawkins to draw off her furred boots for her, told me that all had not gone strait. She entered the room, evidently out of tune.

“What a fire!” said she, crossly.

“I thought, poor thing, you would be perishing with cold. Even in this warm corner the thermometer is only at fifty-five.”

"Fifty-five to a person who, for hours, has been in a temperature twenty or thirty degrees lower! It is stifling. Bring the tea-things, Hawkins; I should like tea better than supper. Or a cup of strong coffee. Is there any?"

"It is all ready for you," said I, anxious to please.

"Do take away some of these dishes, Hawkins. One would think I was an alderman. What have you got there? A sweetbread? Well, you may leave that. Don't take away the browned potatoes. This coffee has scalded my mouth."

She sighed—I sighed.

"All has not gone well, I fear?" said I, anxiously.

"I'll talk about business when Hawkins is gone."

Hawkins sensibly retreated.

Jacintha, however, was in no mood to avail herself immediately of her departure. She ate abstractedly and silently, finished with a glass of wine, then threw herself into her easy-chair, and sat looking into the fire.

"Well?" said I, at last.

"Well, there's little to tell. I have had a fatiguing day, and nothing but worry. When I reached Mrs. Callender's, I sent in word that I wished to see her alone, and desired Margaret to remain in the fly till sent for; but scarcely had I entered Mrs. Callender's boudoir, where she met me with her sweetest looks and studied smiles, when Margaret rushed past me, crying out, 'They've sent

me home, and say I'm a thief!' Then, of course, ensued a scene."

"And Mrs. Callender—"

"Mrs. Callender took Margaret's part—would not hear a word I had to say—was sure Margaret had been treated very badly—had been injudiciously managed all along, or we should have obtained more control over her—and so forth, all in the girl's presence, with Margaret hanging about her neck and darting at me sly looks of defiance. To conclude, Mrs. Callender said that Margaret was the orphan of her dearest friend, and she was bound by every principle of duty and affection to make her cause her own, and therefore should send a proper escort for her daughters to-morrow to remove them from our care."

This was a blow!

"In fact, she would hear nothing," continued Jacintha, "and I own I at last became very angry, and told her my opinion pretty freely; saying I should think it due to our characters to write full particulars to Mr. Callender. She assured me that Mr. Callender would make it a point of honour not to read a letter she requested him not to read, especially when she told him its nature. I bowed, and withdrew: leaving her and Margaret in an embracing attitude, admirably adapted for a *tableau*. What a hypocrite that child is!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play !
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day !
Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College.

MARIAN had quietly entered the room at the beginning of Jacintha's narration, and listened to it with sorrowful attention.

"Our school will be quite broken up," said she, after a pause, "reduced from twelve to seven!"

"What about Emma Grove?" said I, abruptly. "Is she coming back?"

"Oh dear, no," replied Jacintha, "I proceeded to Heatherton on leaving Mrs. Callender's, and sent in my name, but Mr. Grove flatly refused to see me. However, I persevered, saying I had a communication to make of great importance, on which I was admitted. There he stood on his hearth-rug, with his hands behind him, and barely greeted me with a nod and a short, dry cough, not even inviting me to a seat. However, that was a lady's privilege, so I coolly took one, and then said I was sure he would rejoice to hear we had fully satisfied ourselves of his daughter's innocence. He said, not at all; he had been satisfied with it all along, and it was a disgrace to us to have been ever other-

wise. He had no curiosity, not he, to hear any of the particulars, for none but ourselves would ever have entertained so preposterous an opinion on the subject. In spite of this rebuff, I proceeded to relate the particulars of Margaret's delinquency, to which I saw that he listened with close attention, though he only responded with 'ha,' and 'hum.' A pause then ensued; which I broke by saying, 'Could we have done otherwise?' 'Certainly you could,' replied he, bluffly; 'I think you could have done otherwise from beginning to end.' I was ready to say, 'How?' but thought it best not."

"Much," interjected I.

"So I inquired after Emma, to which he replied, 'She's not at home.' I said I hoped she was well, and that I had been much in hopes of seeing her and telling her how sorry—but he interrupted me, bluntly, with 'Ma'am, there's no need. Her welfare can be no concern of yours, and the less that's said on it the better.' So I rose, bowed, and came away; for what could be done with such a bear? He made a feint of seeing me out, but only advanced about two steps, and then retreated and rang the bell violently. He offered me neither rest nor refreshment, though I was cold and hungry, and it was beginning to snow."

"Dear me, we have had no snow here!" said I.

"Oh, have you not!" said Jacintha, ironically: "look out and see for yourself."

"Certainly, the shutters have been closed

ever since dusk," said I. "Did *you* know of the snow, Marian?"

Marian nodded. "Poor Jacintha!" said she.

"Poor Jacintha, you may well call me," replied Jacintha, with self-pity. "I had so many painful things to think of, that I did not look about me much; but when I did, I thought I had never travelled through a more bleak, disconsolate country. To improve matters, the driver lost his way."

"Oh!" said we both, sympathetically.

"And, just at dusk, the fly overturned."

"Oh, poor Jacintha! What *did* you do?"

"Do? What could I? but wait till it was set up again—not growing any the warmer for one of the windows being broken."

Marian started up, kissed her, and rested her hand on her shoulder.

"Don't pity me, please," said Jacintha, with a tear in her eye. "I am warmed and comforted now, and shall go to bed. It's all in the day's work."

"Yes, my dear sister," said I, "and a hard day's work you have had! While we have been sitting still, warm and sheltered, *you* have undertaken a long and perilous journey, in inclement weather, and for our sakes encountered those who were more inhospitable than the season."

"Oh, we're all in the same boat," said Jacintha, smiling a little; "you need not make me out a heroine."

We wished each other good-night. I undressed with a heavy heart, and thought how

distressed the Callenders would be to hear they were going home.

They did not show as much grief as I had expected. Rose was much concerned, but said little, and did not shed a tear ; Henrietta cried, but only, I think, at parting with Fanny Ward, with whom she had formed a close intimacy. A consequential lady's-maid came to fetch them, and accomplished her purpose with great expedition. It was just before dinner, but she said she was directed to permit no delay, so they drove away, and our shrunken party sat down to a meal that to some of us was comfortless enough, while the mirth of those who did not trouble themselves with passing events seemed rather unseasonable.

Cheerfulness, however, was a desideratum. I hinted it to Marian, who immediately acted upon it, and when it grew dusk, I could hear merry voices at Christmas games in the school-room, while Jacintha and I sat by the fire and sighed. After a time, she said, "This won't do," and went to the piano, and played some polkas that jarred on my nerves sadly. I said "Something serious, please;" so then she sang, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," throwing her whole soul into it, till my eyes overflowed with quiet tears.

Fanny Ward had stolen in on hearing the singing, preferring her request for admission by a look, to which I as mutely responded in assent. She seated herself on a low stool at the other side of the fire, her head in the shade ; and presently I saw the little white

pocket handkerchief with ribbed border drawn out and stealthily applied to her eyes. Poor Fanny ! we are apt to laugh at school-girl friendships, but they are often more genuine, and formed on a more intimate knowledge of real character, than those which we contract in later life ; and say that some of them are childish and fleeting,—are they never such in riper years ?

Jacintha, after a pause, turned about, and looking at us, said—

“ You couple of dummies ! ”

“ We have paid you a high compliment,” said I, “ for you have made both of us cry.”

“ Oh, that’s the case, is it ! ” said Jacintha, in good-humour, for she was very alive to praise ; and, seating herself beside Fanny, who made a movement to rise, she passed her hand caressingly over her flaxen hair, saying, “ Don’t go, child ; ” and the next time I looked up, I saw her arm round Fanny’s neck and their hands locked together. Jacintha could be very caressing sometimes, and her power over the affections was then irresistible : the pity was that she had not quite an even temper.

All at once, the door flew open, and—

“ Ladies, an interlude is going to be performed by Her Majesty’s servants of Poplar House ! ” cried Marian : and in poured a motley crew of

Black spirits and white,
Blue spirits and grey,

who “ did their spiriting gently,” and improvised a passing idea of Marian’s with good

effect; after which they trooped out as confusedly as Comus's rabble-rout. Where was school discipline? Ay, where was it, indeed! It would have been an awful sight to Mrs. Cole and Miss Melissa; and yet, somehow, no insubordination ensued, and I, for one, was all the better for it. As they danced off, Fanny Ward danced off with them, polking with Marian.

At prayer-time, I observed a good deal of coughing and sniffing, and two of the girls proved to have such troublesome colds, that I desired them to remain in bed the following morning, unless they were better. In the morning, they were not better, but worse; and Matilda Fox was so feverish, and complained of so many aches and pains, that I thought it expedient to send for Mr. Herne.

This was the first time we had had a doctor in the house. Marian had remarked, only a few evenings before, what a singular immunity we had had; and I had said, with a kind of presentiment of evil, "Oh, Marian! don't boast;" to which she had temperately replied, "No, I did not mean to boast—I am only thankful."

And now, here was the doctor! What a good thing it is, that when a nice, comfortable-looking medical man first crosses the threshold, imparting re-assurance by his very smile, people don't know how often they shall see him! Their hearts would sink, if they knew all the scenes with which he and they are to be associated.

Mr. Herne was a very pleasant, middle-aged,

married man, in good practice: it was considered a treat to see him when people were not seriously ill; and when they *were*—oh! then how they hung upon his looks—what an oracle he became! And well he might!

Mr. Herne pronounced Matilda to be sicken-ing of fever, that might or might not be infectious. She was still removable, and as her mother only lived at the other end of the town, he thought she had better be removed.

I hesitated about taking her out of her warm bed, even to be wrapped in blankets. There was still a sprinkling of snow on the ground, and I not only demurred, from humanity towards the child, but I felt that our school was just now under a cloud, which a garbled version of simple facts might thicken and darken.

“As you think best,” said Mr. Herne, in reply. (We were conferring in my own little parlour.) “The little girl may do well: I have only suggested a precautionary measure for the sake of others.”

Jacintha often accused me of irresolution. I was irresolute now.

“Suppose we refer it to Mrs. Fox,” said I. “If she does not object to the hazard, it will certainly be better for her daughter to be nursed at home.”

So I wrote to Mrs. Fox. And Mrs. Fox, in reply, said she was just going to an evening party, and had perfect confidence in our nursing. So indifferent as some people are!—even mothers!—I cannot understand it. Her note was not written till quite late in the

evening ; much too late for the removal to be attempted with safety : we had given up the idea of it. Mrs. Fox came to see her little girl the next day : she was very nicely dressed, and looked very comely and comfortable. She gave us the most flattering assurances of her entire confidence in us ; was happy to say Matilda never took things heavily ; was sure she was not going to be ill now ; felt no reluctance to leave her in our hands, while she spent a few days in London, and trusted to find dear Matilda quite well on her return. And, leaving with her a well-filled *bonbonnière*, she kissed her, smiled sweetly, and sailed away.

The little Duncans proved to have influenza. I kept them in bed and wrote to their mother, who, on account of her chest, I regret to say, was at Torquay. Mr. Duncan had retired from business ; and now that he could live where he liked, as far as that was concerned, he seemed doomed to be settled on the southern coast, on account of his wife. There was no need to frighten her ; nor did I. In her reply, she expressed no uneasiness, but begged I would send her a daily *bulletin*, till her little girls were convalescent. She wrote quite a chatty letter, and said they had fallen in with a family of the name of Mortlake, who had made many inquiries about us, and she had spoken of us very freely, as she thought they might have a pupil for us in view.

I did not know whether this would vex or please Jacintha, so I gave her the note without comment. I found she would rather have been without either note or comment.

"When *will* people learn not to meddle with their neighbours' affairs?" cried she. "Just as if I should want a niece of Mr. Mortlake's for a pupil! O dear me!"

I observed, afterwards, that her eyes looked very heavy. But it was not with crying; she had caught the influenza, as had Miss Dixon, and two or three others of us. When Mr. Herne came, he said merrily, "It will go through the house:" but it was no source of merriment to me; though I always felt in my element when nursing was required. In vain Jacintha and Marian said, "Isabella! you will make yourself ill!" I did no such thing, took prudent precautions, kept out of draughts, went down into the cold drawing-room as seldom as I could, and took up my post, now by one bedside, now by another, knitting, chatting, and keeping my little patients quietly amused, which I could do as well as the strongest of them.

Miss Dixon, whose bedroom was shared by Matilda Fox, said she could nurse her cold there as well as anywhere else; and as Matilda required attention, it was as well to let Miss Dixon confine herself to that room as not, since she had no fear of the fever, and if she were to have it, had probably taken it already.

Jacintha battled manfully with her attack, and would not succumb, though it was fearful to hear her cough. Our cook, who was a selfish woman, and would not put herself out of the way in any emergency, was, to do her justice, a capital maker of broths and

arrowroot, of which she sent up abundant supplies: and Hawkins trotted up and down stairs with them till she was ready to drop. At length, poor Hawkins was laid low, and that was indeed a loss; for the under servants poorly supplied her place. Marian feared they neglected her dear old Hawkins, and stole up into her attic many times a day, which so distressed Hawkins, that she declared if Miss Marian would not give it up, she would leave her bed, dress herself, and sit by the kitchen fire.

She was quite too ill for this, therefore a compromise was made, the terms of which Marian did not keep with quite her usual faithfulness; and when Hawkins threatened to get up, Mr. Herne's name was used with great authority.

Then Sarah, the under-housemaid, began to look woful and cough a little. She was very easily discouraged at any time; and when I said to Mr. Herne I thought we must engage a temporary nurse, and asked him if he could recommend one who was trustworthy and efficient, he said, "To tell you the truth, even if it had not been for those limitations, I fear I could not assist you, for just now every one is laid aside. You fancy your case an uncommon one, but I have seventy influenza cases now on my books, to say nothing of other diseases attributable, more or less, to the season, and every nurse is engaged or ill herself."

I afterwards found this was no exaggerated statement, and that in London, indeed, the

mortality was fearful—*influenza* slaying more victims than the more greatly dreaded cholera. Laura wrote word to Jacintha, that she met hearses and walking-funerals at every turn; that in three of the largest shops in Regent Street every customer was buying black; that in omnibuses frequently every passenger was in black; that in driving along Oxford Street she had only seen three genteel persons who were not in mourning. As for church bells, they were continually tolling.

This was awful: and I read the *influenza* reports daily printed in the *Times* with morbid avidity, but put them out of the way of my sisters when I could. Whenever one tries a little *ruse* of this kind, however, it is generally unsuccessful: Marian and Jacintha were quite as much interested in the bills of mortality as I was, and Marian plainly said, "What is the use of not knowing what is going on among our fellow-creatures, Isabella? Surely, we ought to pity them, and pray for them, though we cannot relieve them; and as long as we are somewhat less severely visited, we ought to be very thankful. I think people neglect God's plain purpose in not taking a very serious view of such visitations. He *means* us to be awed by them, and as we none of us know we shall escape, we ought to prepare ourselves for the most serious consequences; that, if they should occur, we need not be afraid with any amazement."

This was so much my own feeling, that thenceforth I attempted no concealment, and even read the reports aloud after the girls

had gone to bed, till Jacintha at length cried—

“ Isabella, your voice really becomes more and more lugubrious. For pity’s sake, don’t read me any more such accounts, unless you mean to make me break down altogether. You quite give me the horrors ! ”

When Jacintha said this, she was preparing to sit up all night with poor little Lucy Field. We had now two or three very severe cases, which Mr. Herne was watching with anxiety ; but neither he nor I had considered Lucy’s the worst till within the last few hours. Still I could not charge myself with neglect of her. I had been with her continually, and never left her except under proper charge ; but she had been rather light-headed for two days, and had said such funny things, that it was impossible for any of her attendants to help smiling at them ; and this, I suppose, got us into the way of thinking that the dear little girl was not so ill as either of the Duncans, who were more evidently suffering. This day, however, the case had altered. Marian came into my room early the next morning, with tears in her eyes, and said, “ Isabella, do come and see Lucy : she no longer rambles, but persists in a low muttering, and though her eyes are open, they have the strangest look, and I am sure she does not see us.”

Much alarmed, I went to her instantly, and found her exactly as Marian had described. Jacintha was bending over her with a look of deep care. The instant I appeared,

she looked up, and said in an under tone, "Send for Mr. Herne." I hastily did so, and then returned, Marian continuing to stand at the foot of the bed, the picture of woe.

When Mr. Herne came, he said aside to me, "Send for her mother." I begged Marian to do so, and remained at my post. I said, "Lucy, love, do you hear me?" No answer. Dismayed, I turned to Mr. Herne, and whispered, "Is there any hope?" He shook his head. My heart gave such a bound, and then seemed to die. I said, "What would be the first favourable sign?" He sadly replied, "To cease that muttering, and close her eyes." I sighed. Presently I said, "She seems choking." He did not answer. It ceased. She gave four such peaceful breaths! I looked at him—hopefully—dismayed! He said, "Poor little soul! All is over!"

CHAPTER XV.

Yet see, how all around them wait,
The ministers of human fate,
And black Misfortune's baleful train !
Ah, show them where in ambush stand,
To seize their prey, the murderous band !
Ode on a distant view of Eton College.

EVERY circumstance connected with that scene is stamped on my memory in characters that, I think, will never be effaced. I still see Jacintha's look of anguish and Mr. Herne's silent concern—I still hear Marian's choking sobs, and see her kneeling beside the inanimate little form.

While yet overwhelmed with sorrow, I was summoned to receive the poor mother, and break the sad news to her—how *can* such news be broken? the mind leaps forward to receive it, and then reels under the shock.

To communicate it to the girls was a lighter task, yet painful enough—it fell to the lot of Jacintha, for Marian was so choking with sobs that she could not sufficiently control herself. I was obliged to consign her to poor Hawkins, who now crept about, for I could not leave Mrs. Field, and Jacintha could not leave the girls, only three of whom were convalescent. Our seven had already been reduced to six; and,



before nightfall, they were only five, for Mrs. Fox having returned, had sent her servant to inquire, and the servant had carried back a report of Lucy's death; on which Mrs. Fox, giving way to her feelings, without allowing her reason the least exercise, came to us with all speed in a fly, and insisted on instantly carrying home "her dear child, her darling Matilda," wrapped in blankets, from what she called "our infected house," though if it were infected, it was by the poor child herself, who now was nearly well, and might as safely have been wrapped in a shawl as in a blanket. But then there would not have been a scene; and some people like scenes; and Mrs. Fox made much more of one than Mrs. Field, who kept quietly wiping her eyes by the fire. I was disturbed at losing another pupil—when we had had all the real trouble of her illness, too!—but was not sorry to have our immediate responsibilities diminished by her removal; and was heartily glad to see the last of the hysterical fine lady, her mother.

"How some people give way to their feelings!" I could not help saying to the meek-looking little woman in widow's mourning, who was drying her red eyes by the fire-side. "You have been heavily and unexpectedly bereaved; but 'whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,' and great as your loss is, you are able, even already, to kiss the hand that smites, and to own that your sweet little girl has a better portion allotted her than any you could provide for her in this sorrowful world."

"I *own* it, but I can't *feel* it," said the poor

mother, weeping. "Oh, pray for me, Miss Middlemass, for my heart seems locked!"

"I will, I will!" said I; and, kneeling down, I began to offer up what I meant to be only a few words of entreaty for submission and composure, but somehow the subject grew upon me, and I became more and more fervent in supplication, while the poor mother, kneeling close beside me, checked her sobs and closed my prayer with a hearty Amen.

On rising from my knees, I saw Fanny Ward doing the same; and she then timidly stole up to Mrs. Field and stroked her hand. Thinking her artless comfortings might suffice for awhile, I went to look after the rest of the house, and found Jacintha in quest of me.

"I sent Fanny for you," said she, "and wondered you did not come. Is the undertaker still to be sent for?"

"Fanny found me engaged in prayer with poor Mrs. Field," said I, "and, instead of interrupting, knelt down too."

"A dear girl she is," said Jacintha. "She has been talking so nicely to the Duncans and to Marian! I can't think where she has picked up some of the things she has said—they did not seem the fruit of such a young mind. But Mrs. Field—"

"Mrs. Field wishes the removal to take place after dark. She says we are very kind, but she does not feel this to be like home. Her sister is summoned to meet her there, so perhaps it will be best for her as well as for us. I am now going up with her to poor Lucy."

"Don't call her poor Lucy," said Jacintha,

with a look of grief. "She is better off than any of us. I am sure I would change with her." And she hurried away.

I found Mrs. Field on her way from the drawing-room, attended by Fanny, who reminded me of Ruth supporting Naomi. We silently went up to the chamber of death, where the peaceful remains of the dear little girl, composed by the hand of affection, looked like innocence in repose. A few snowdrops lay on the white sheet, beside the scarcely less white hands. There was an inexpressible smile on her lips—her lineaments were all beauty, and she looked asleep rather than dead. Hawkins stood reverently beside her, with folded hands; and Marian, on the other side of the bed, sat looking fixedly at the fair little face, with eyes that could weep no more. Fanny's arm was presently round her waist, and she gently drew her away, to make room for the bereaved mother.

In the darkness of wintry, starless night, little Lucy's remains were quietly removed. Mrs. Field's sister had fortunately answered the summons so promptly that she was able to accompany her home, which was a great relief to me, as I could not bear her going alone, and yet none of us were well enough to venture out with prudence.

When they were gone, I felt ready to say, with old Cosmo de Medici, "This is too large a house for so small a family!" There were now only Fanny Ward, Bessy Unwin, and Clara Hughes in the school-room. Miss Dixon was convalescent, but very weak, and remained up-

stairs to nurse the two Duncans. Marian had such an intense headache that she reluctantly went to bed early ; and Jacintha, after a vain attempt at lessons, had said—

“ My dears, I think you must consider this a half-holiday, though a very sorrowful one. Employ yourselves in any way you like—I know I can trust you.”

I believe they availed themselves of this to do little enough. I had glimpses of them now and then, leaning on their elbows on the window-seat, or sitting over the fire, talking in subdued voices. It does not harm children to take part now and then, in this way, in the cares and sorrows of others. If we keep such things too much out of their sight, they will, on their entrance into life, be children still.

But I did not wish them to mope. Therefore, when the removal of poor little Lucy’s remains had taken place, and the house was hushed and still, I went in to them and said, “ Come and sit with me, dears, now, in my room.” Bessy and Clara immediately obeyed with gladness ; Fanny Ward had crept off to Marian ; and Jacintha, glad to be off duty at last, threw herself on the comfortable black horsehair sofa, which still occupied its old place, directly we left her in possession of the dining-room. I knew she would like solitude and rest beyond anything else ; and, as for me—it was all in the day’s work, and I was fond of children. So we did not—

“ Sit upon the ground,
And tell strange stories of the deaths of kings ; ”

but we spoke of little Lucy affectionately and naturally, and told one another little traits we had observed of her goodness, and the children asked me certain questions about things that awed and puzzled them, and I explained away some of their vague terrors concerning what are only the trappings of death, and spoke to them lovingly and hopefully of heavenly rewards and earthly privileges, responsibilities, and duties, and the goodness of the blessed Saviour in dying that all who believed in him might be saved—and sent them to bed, serious but not sad.

At dead of night I was aroused from sleep by Marian, who stood beside me in her night-clothes, saying—

“ Isabella! Isabella!—I want to go to church! I want to go to church!”

Although her eyes were wide open, they were fixed on vacancy, and I knew directly that she was not herself. Springing up hastily, I took her hand, and said—

“ It is not church-time yet, dearest, and the snow is on the ground. We will wait till to-morrow morning.”

“ Oh, to-morrow morning may never come,” said she, with that dreary, dreaming look which Flaxman has given Clytemnestra awaking the Furies. “ Who knows what to-morrow may bring forth? And your hand is hot—so hot! While *I* . . . Cold, cold as death!” And she shuddered.

“ You are dreaming, dearest Marian,” said I. “ You have been overwrought, and are disquieted. Come, lie down by me”—and I

would have drawn her down beside me, but she shivered, and said, "Oh, no ! oh, no !"

"Come back then to your own nice warm bed," said I, putting my arm round her waist. "Let me lead you back to Fanny Ward—good little Fanny—you love dear little Fanny ?"

She seemed touched by my endearing tones, and said, "Little Fanny ? Oh, yes ; little Fanny."

I led her back to her bed, saying, gently and cheerfully, "Why, how funny little Fanny will think it if she wakes and finds you are gone !—how she will wonder where you are, will not she ?"

She answered with a ghastly smile, and dropped on her bed as if quite exhausted by some preternatural effort. Fanny, who had just awoke, looked at her and then at me in silent wonder, but I laid my finger on my lips and gave a little nod, which the good girl understood, and she lay down beside her companion, putting her arm protectingly over her. Both closed their eyes ; and after watching over them a minute or two, I returned, chilled to the heart, to bed.

I lay awake, pondering what this might mean. Was it merely the effect of fatigue and anxiety, or was it the prelude to some sad catastrophe ? I thought over all that Marian had done since the first opening of our school, and it seemed amazing that she had not broken down long before ! No labour like head-labour ! And her every faculty of body and mind had constantly been on the full stretch, to their utmost powers of tension,

and now their attenuated cords had burst! What if her mind had received an irreparable injury? How could Jacintha and I have been so inhuman, so infatuated, so stupid and selfish as to let her peril her dear life so?

Then I hoped I was needlessly alarming myself, and that in the morning I should find her mind restored by refreshing sleep. Yet I could not but remember how early delirium had been one of little Lucy's most remarkable symptoms. Meanwhile, I was conscious of having taken a severe chill, and of having acute pains all over me. I supposed my turn was coming next, and thought I could bear it with indifference, except for the being incapacitated from usefulness. I commended my case, the case of the whole house, very earnestly and piteously to God, in doing which I fell asleep.

I was awoke, at morning dawn, by Fanny Ward, who, with looks of dismay, said, "Oh, Miss Middlemass—I can't tell what to think of her!" and burst into tears.

In spite of my chill overnight, and the aches and pains that sharply reminded me of it, I could not, would not dress, more than by putting on my warm flannel dressing-gown and furred slippers. Hastily following Fanny to her bedside, I found Marian lying with her eyes open, looking very much flushed, and talking very fast.

"Good morning, Isabella," said she, "why, one would think it was June, and yet it is only January—I think so, is not it?" and then she ran over the names of the months. "How

droll you look! Your hair is all rough, and I see Brazil beetles creeping all over you—pretty, shining creatures, all green and gold!"

I saw how the case was, and went immediately to tell Jacintha, with whom I found Hawkins. They both wept when I told them, and Jacintha began to dress very fast. Hawkins hurried down stairs, to send the errand-boy (whom we had taken on in default of better help) for Mr. Herne.

"Oh, if she dies!" said Jacintha, wringing her hands.

"Hush! not a word of it," said I, "or you will make me useless. Miss Dixon is, I think, well enough to look after the girls to-day; Hawkins will sit with the Duncans, and you and I will alternately be with Marian."

In fact, we hardly left her room, and, fortunately, we were very little wanted out of it. Lessons were out of the question, except such as Bessy and Clara thought fit to learn of their own accord, and repeat to Miss Dixon; but they employed themselves one way or another, I was afterwards told, not only inoffensively but meritoriously, being very desirous to show by their good conduct how much they sympathized with us all, and pitied Marian.

Mr. Herne came speedily, and did not conceal from me that it was a very bad case. People will remember that delirium was a striking and fatal symptom in many who died of the influenza of 1837. She was not delirious always, *at first*; and we could bring her from

her wanderings by reading the Psalms to her, which she would often repeat after us. But continuous reading, even of this sort, soon became unsupportable to her, so that we could only resort to it with extreme caution. What a miserable day it was ! and I, all the while, provoked with myself for being unable to ignore my own pains, and for cowering in draughts, and being obliged to hack, and clear my throat, at the risk of disturbing Marian.

Dear angel ! she was almost past disturbing, being very little cognizant of anything that went on around her. Fanny bathed her burning forehead with diluted spirits of wine, hour after hour,—lifting off one heated rag and laying on another, refreshingly cool, as delicately as the most practised hand could have done. No nursing like that of genuine affection ! It was impossible to get that child away from her ; and after a time, we forbore to try it ; I silently thinking within myself she was unconsciously laying up a store of heart-experience that would be invaluable to her throughout life, and place her character thenceforth on a higher platform.

At night, this young creature wanted to sit up with Marian ! And when I imperatively, though not unkindly, said “No,” her tears flowed so bitterly that she was forced to go out into the corridor. I followed her and kissed her, and at length was obliged to say, “Well, my love, you shall sit up to-morrow night, if dear Marian requires it.”

“*If?*” repeated Fanny, taking my words in their worst sense, and bursting out afresh.

"I did not mean that," said I, deeply moved, and leading her into my own room. "Go to bed here, my dear girl, you cannot sleep with Marian to-night. Jacintha is lying down now in her own room, after having made me faithfully promise to wake her at twelve o'clock. I shall then come and be a companion to you. God bless you, my dear, dear girl! Remember Marian fervently in your prayers. That is an effectual way of being of service to her, and one that will bring down a blessing on your own head. I love you dearly, Fanny! Good night, dear girl!"

CHAPTER XVI.

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform ;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

JOHN NEWTON.

I RETREATED with my little writing-case in my hand, and at Marian's bedside wrote John an account of our varied trials, and of this our heaviest trial of all. Then it occurred to me that the promised bulletin to Mrs. Duncan had been forgotten, and I penned a cheering account of her girls, and mentioned little Lucy's death and Marian's illness, without appealing to her feelings more than I could help. When this little task was over, I folded my hands, meditated, and offered many a short and voiceless, but fervent prayer.

Hawkins persisted in sitting up the whole night—she said, “it never hurt her.” I would gladly have borne her company, but my influenza-cold was very heavy, and Jacintha had so strenuously insisted on my going to bed at twelve o'clock, that I could not break the promise she had extorted. At the appointed time, I roused her as gently as I could from the uneasy slumber: she started up at my first touch, saying, “How is she now?”
“Just beginning to be restless. She has

been lying very quiet, but with her eyes always wide open, though she does not notice anything."

"Good night, dear Isabella."

"You will be *sure* to call me, if there is the smallest change."

"Depend upon me."

We kissed each other affectionately.

I was glad to find Fanny asleep, though with a tear on her cheek. I listened long and anxiously to the distinctly audible sound of Marian's voice in her delirium. At length, it ceased. Worn out and ill, I slept—then, with a start, awoke, at the sound, as I thought, of a scream and a scuffle. I went softly to her door: it was locked. I listened—all was still—just as I was going, I thought I heard some one moving about, and a heavy sigh. It was not a warrant for disturbing those within, and I returned to bed.

In the cold grey morning light I woke and saw Hawkins beside me, looking heavy-eyed and worn. As Fanny still slept, I whispered, "What sort of a night?"

"A very poor one, ma'am," she returned, shaking her head—"a *very* poor one."

"I will come directly," said I, hastily dressing myself. Hawkins assisted me as much as she could, and then went away, I soon following her.

I never saw Jacintha look so haggard: Marian, on the contrary, had a brilliant colour, and her eyes were like stars. She was talking as fast as ever, and I vainly endeavoured to check her. At length I took up her prayer-

book, and began to read the Twenty-third Psalm. Immediately she hushed. Jacintha and I exchanged glances, and Jacintha noiselessly left the room. When I had finished that psalm I began another, but she exclaimed, "Oh no, no!" and pressed her hand to her forehead, with a look of pain. I desisted. Just then I heard the sound of our muffled knocker, presently followed by Mr. Herne's quiet tread on the stairs. It was full early. Jacintha, who had luckily not undressed, opened the bedroom door and came in with him. He was a nice, fresh-coloured man, generally, but he now looked inexpressibly harassed. I pitied him, for I thought he perhaps had other patients as ill or worse than Marian; but I afterwards heard from his wife that she had never known him so interested as in this particular case.

We mutually saluted each other, and I rose to give him my seat by the bed, which he took. Gently placing his hand on Marian's, he said—

"Do you know me?"

She sweetly replied—

"Yes, you are Mr. Herne."

"Are you better?"

"No."

"Well, I think you are. You must try and get well."

"I shall never get well."

There was a pause.

"Do you think you can eat anything to-day?"

"Perhaps."

"A mutton-chop?"

She shuddered.

"A little bread-and-milk, then?"

"Yes, I think I shall like that."

"You shall have it, then. Good-bye."

I followed him out. We went into a little dressing-room, where we were joined by Jacintha, who left Hawkins in her place.

"She says," said Jacintha, with eyes full of tears, "that she knows you think she will not recover, you looked so blank when you felt her pulse."

"God only knows!" replied he, deeply moved. "Her pulse is almost gone. You must try to get her to take a teaspoonful of port wine."

"How often?"

"Every ten minutes, if you will, till we can raise her pulse. What of her night?"

Jacintha faltered, and looked towards me, as if she dreaded giving me pain.

There *had* been a scuffle and a scream. Marian had sprung out of bed, wildly crying, "They're calling me!" and Jacintha, with the utmost difficulty, held her back, on which Marian screamed, and pushed Jacintha so violently, that she fell and struck her head against the table; while Marian, exhausted, fell back motionless on her bed, and was in that state tended by Jacintha and Hawkins when I tried the door. Hawkins, who had been dozing by the fire, was aroused by Marian's scream, and hastened to turn the key.

Jacintha's tears burst forth as she spoke. She said—

"I meant for the best!"

"For the best?—to be sure you did!" said Mr. Herne, warmly. "Your conduct is devoted! admirable!" and much more to the same purport, which called the colour into poor Jacintha's pale cheeks. I, too, came in for my share, and listened in silent wonder, not seeing the drift of such unqualified commendations, nor how they were called for. I am now convinced that he as completely designed his praise to be a temporary support and stimulant to us, as the port wine to poor Marian.

Jacintha, cheered up for the moment, returned to her post. I remained to talk things over with him a little longer, and to accompany him to see the little Duncans, whom he pronounced well enough to go down stairs after breakfast. He spoke cheerfully to them, shook my hand warmly, said in an under tone that he should look in on us again later in the day, and departed.

I leant over the banisters to see if any servant were in waiting to open the door for him. I saw Hawkins step forward to do so, and heard her tremulous question of "Any hope, sir?"

"Very little, I fear," was his reply in a guarded under tone, "but I must keep up the spirits of her poor sisters." And then he went home to lay his arms on the table, his wife afterwards told me, and lay his head on his arms and shed tears.

My heart sank at those words, but I dared not give way. I went into my room, and, before Fanny could get the start, said—

“Fanny, my dear, I am going to put a great charge on your young shoulders.”

“Oh, what is it, please?” said she, with brightening looks.

“To make breakfast for *all* of us. It will be an arduous task, but one, I am sure, you can fulfil. Here is the key of the tea-caddy. You will take the head of the table, and Clara and Bessy will, I am sure, give as little trouble as possible; and you will send up three breakfast cups of tea to my dressing-room, and three to Miss Dixon and the Miss Duncans, who will come down stairs after breakfast.”

Fanny looked proud and pleased.

“May I not first —” she began.

“No, dear, it will not be convenient for you to see her just now. I am going to sit with her quite quietly, and no one else is to be in the room. Mr. Herne has seen her, and told her he thinks her better,” added I, not quite honestly, for I knew he had said what he did not think, “and we will hope it may prove true.”

There was still dinner to order, and Miss Dixon to speak to, before I could release Jacintha. The first was easily done—mutton-broth, beef-tea, bread-pudding. I called Miss Dixon into my little dressing-room, and said—

“You are going down stairs to-day, my dear Miss Dixon, after a long confinement; but you will be duly careful of yourself, I know (pressing her hand), if you remember that your health is valuable to *us* as well as to yourself.”



"Oh, Miss Middlemass!"

"Yes, my dear Miss Dixon, *very* valuable; and the more so, because at the present time the whole burthen of the school-room must literally devolve on you. Luckily, at present, it is *very* light; and you may make it as much lighter as you like. Just keep the children employed and quiet, without much troubling them or yourself; I leave all to your good judgment with perfect confidence."

"Everything in my power to do, I am sure shall be done," said Miss Dixon, looking flattered. "They used to say at home that I was not — *very* bright, you know" (lowering her voice), "so that, indeed, Miss Middlemass, I feel the distinction of your confidence all the more."

"*You* will read prayers this morning," said I, again pressing her hand, and then left her. I quietly took Jacintha's place, begging her, as soon as she had breakfasted, to lie down for a few hours, and assuring her I had arranged everything below, so that neither of us would be wanted. She looked thankful, and departed.

When I sat down beside Marian, I said, "Try to close your eyes, dearest." She did; but, alas! those large, unsleeping orbs were soon fixed on me again in unnatural brightness. She said, smiling, "Cannot you look more cheerful?"

Oh, I cannot go on! I hardly know how the next few days went. I know she became worse instead of better. I know we became so worn out, that we could hardly stand,

hardly speak, hardly keep awake, and yet we felt we must. I remember Mr. Herne's thinking her hair must be cut off, and my piteous, "Oh, don't!" and then my thinking what folly and sin it was to put any disfigurement in competition with her life, and volunteering to cut it off, and his sighing and saying, "No need!"

I saw he despaired: all my faith and hope in human skill vanished as he departed; and yet, two hours after, we were sending an urgent message to him again, and when I thought I heard him at the door, I was so impatient that I hurried down to him myself. Instead of him, it was the Reverend Mr. Barnet! Oh, what a disappointment! I burst into tears, and the good man, doubtless much surprised, took my hand, and led me into the parlour.

He told me he and Mary had heard that our house was visited by grievous sickness, and that at her urgent request, he had come purposely to make inquiries, and to know whether she could be of any assistance.

And he spoke as only a good and effective minister can speak. Not such trite sayings as "all,—all must die," such as one might expect to hear from our prosy old rector, Dr. Hook, if, indeed, he had ever troubled himself to pay a ministerial visit. Never once did I wish Dr. Hook's shadow to fall across our door—still less that of his conceited young curate. A different minister was Mr. Barnet from either of these; and I so felt him to be the right sort of sympathizer and strengthener, that,

without more ado, I dried my eyes and told him our sad case, and begged his prayers. These he promised, and Mary's too, and he wished to know whether I were desirous he should now pray beside Marian. I was just going to answer, when a hasty, though muffled knock made me hasten from him, expecting to see Mr. Herne. Instead of him it was—John! Poor John had travelled fast, and at great inconvenience to himself, to see Marian, as he feared, for the last time. My heart was very full, just then—receiving visitors, even such as John and Mr. Barnet, kept me from where I was wanted and wishing to be; still, I was gratified at this proof of brotherly love, and I knew that Marian, if conscious, would be deeply gratified too. But she had not recognised us, nor spoken for many hours—only lay with her eyes half open, chanting a wailing kind of tune, that died and rose again like an *Æolian harp*.

I left them, and sent up to tell Jacintha. She wept, and said, "Let Mr. Barnet come up, —and John too. It may do John good to see her; and tell Mr. Barnet to begin some of the church-prayers very softly, and, if they seem to make her worse, to desist, and quietly leave the room."

I went down and did so. John looked much awed; he trod softly, and offered me his arm, saying, "So much going up and down stairs is bad for you, my poor Isabella."

I said, "When nurses begin to think of themselves before their patients, something is wrong."

He followed Mr. Barnet into the room, and silently and sadly kissed Jacintha at the door; then softly stole towards the bed. Marian was quite quiet. When Mr. Barnet said, "Peace be to this house and to all that dwell in it," I thought I perceived a little trembling of her eyelids, but was not sure. Then Mr. Barnet said, "Let us pray," and we all knelt down—John burying his face in his hands. I could not help looking at Marian as I knelt beside her. We all made the responses in hushed voices, and joined softly in the Lord's Prayer. Once or twice, I fancied she joined; and again in one of the following responses. When Mr. Barnet had concluded the prayer beginning, "Hear us," he did not, of course, attempt the exhortation, but proceeded to that affecting and pathetic invocation, "O Saviour of the world!" and concluded with the beautiful commendatory address and benediction. When I again raised my eyes, I thrilled to meet those of Marian fixed on me in a composed manner. Mr. Barnet silently left the room. Her eyes certainly followed him a little way to the door. Then I beckoned to John, who advanced on tiptoe and bent over her. He said, softly—

"Marian, do you know who I am?"

She replied, "Yes—John—my brother!"

Jacintha burst into tears and went out. John followed her. I whispered to him, wiping my eyes, "Keep Jacintha away a little, if you can, and persuade her to get a little rest." He nodded. Then I returned to Marian. She said, "I'm so tired!" and *shut her eyes*. We remained as we were about an hour. I had not

thought a house could be so still. I believe she slept: I am sure I prayed.

Then Jacintha entered, softly followed by Mr. Herne. He did not disturb Marian, but I saw his eyelids quiver as he bent over her. He whispered, “I believe the crisis is past,” and then went away with Jacintha, who received his directions in another room.

I neither knew nor thought about what went on in other parts of the house—what had become of John, Mr. Barnet, &c. I afterwards found they both went to dine quietly with Mr. Herne. Afterwards, John returned, and had a long talk with Jacintha. It did her good; she could talk and shed tears without restraint, and he pitied us all very much, she told me, and was very kind. He had been very much impressed by the sight of Marian; and by the solemnity of Mr. Barnet’s prayer. Altogether, the effect of the scene upon him was salutary; and it was not wholly mournful, because he began to entertain a hope, as we all did with trembling, that Marian might be saved.

Fanny, who had established herself as my little factotum, went in and out of the parlour twice or thrice while John was there, and said afterwards, “I like Mr. John Middlemass very much—he seems so feeling.”

This had not always been John’s characteristic—indeed, he had been accounted rather the reverse; but some men, like pictures, improve with years, and I think he did. Meanwhile, I was so happy! so happy!—in spite of saying to myself, “We must not rejoice too soon,” hope *had* dawned on my heart, and was

shining more and more unto the perfect day. As for Hawkins, rivers of tears flowed down her furrowed cheeks, and often I saw her hands and eyes raised heavenwards. It seemed a sin not to utter thanksgiving; my prayers continually took that form—and then I chastened myself, and prayed we might not yet hope in vain.

But Marian was certainly sleeping. Hour after hour she slept, and, in the middle of the night, she drank a little beef-tea. Oh, with what ecstasy I hailed her saying with a little smile, "*C'est bien bon!*!" She immediately turned her head on her pillow again, and slept. She had now become so weakened by fever and long abstinence, that she could not move from side to side; but she was so light that we could lift her easily. I never can remember whether it were the fourth or fifth night of my sitting up—however that may have been, my eyes irresistibly closed towards daybreak, and I slept profoundly.

When I woke, Marian was still asleep, and Jacintha standing by me, freshly dressed and with her hair nicely arranged and her face looking many degrees less careworn. She whispered, "John will breakfast at 'The White Hart,' where he slept—he will not look in till nine, and it is now six. Go and have three hours' comfortable rest in your own room, and trust all here to me. I have slept, and am quite refreshed."

I complied; only saying as I glanced towards Marian, "How we ought to thank God!"

"Oh!" said Jacintha, fervently, and clasped

her hands, looking up. She said no more, but that expressive "oh" told volumes.

Fanny Ward was sitting up in bed, rubbing her eyes. She looked inquiringly at me as I entered; and when I told her that Marian seemed improving, she sprung up, threw her arms round me, and cried. Tired out with too much exertion of body and mind for so young a girl, she soon slept again, soundly, and I was soon asleep at her side.

When, after a couple of hours, I woke, I found Fanny awake before me. She said, "How pleasant it is, to wake and remember she is better!"

I said, "Ah Fanny, we have a great deal to be thankful for, but yet a great deal to dread."

"I know she will need a great deal of care taken of her," rejoined Fanny; "but please don't say *dread*, Miss Middlemass! That is so gloomy a word! and you know we are told to take no thought for the morrow, because sufficient to the day is the evil thereof."

"True, love," said I.

When I entered Marian's room, and met her calm, sedate gaze, my heart swelled with gratitude, and I trusted that there was indeed no longer need of dread.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ye fearful souls, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are full of mercy, and will break
In blessings on your head.

JOHN NEWTON.

I HAVE dwelt too long, perhaps, on scenes that are stamped, with too painful accuracy, on my mind. But to us they were of deep, nay, of eternal moment. When such heavy seasons of visitation are among God's providential dealings with us, the soul is ploughed up, and the seed sown is for death or for life.

What a common expression it is, "It harrows up my soul!" The plough leaves the earth in great, rough lumps—the harrow rakes them smooth, like a comb. But all the ploughing and harrowing in the world would be of very little use if the ground remained unsown. And thus great sorrows and dangers may be utterly without good effect on the mind which the heavenly Sower does not sow with his good seed. Mr. Barnet enlarged better than I can do, on this, to Fanny Ward, whom he found in the drawing-room all alone one morning, when he called to inquire. When I entered, he was saying to her,

“Would it be any use to dig and rake your little garden, do you think, if you did not sow seeds in it?”

“It would look all the neater,” said Fanny. He smiled; and as I saw he had an answer ready for her, I begged him to go on.

“An unproductive bit of ground would not be a very pretty garden, I think,” said he: “it would hardly be worth the trouble of digging and raking it, if we did not mean to sow it. Now, it is just so with ourselves. It pleases God sometimes to afflict people whom He loves, so severely that He may be said to plough up their very souls. Why does He do this?”

Fanny’s heart swelled: and I think her unuttered answer was, “I can’t tell—for *I* wouldn’t!”

“He does it, not for the sake of giving them pain, but to prepare them to receive the good seed He intends to scatter on their souls. In Isaiah’s prophecies* you will find allusion made to this. Isaiah says, ‘Doth the ploughman plough, *all day*, to sow? doth he open and break the clods of the ground? When he hath made plain (or smooth) the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches (or vetches) and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and rye?’ Is not that what the ploughman has been taking the trouble of ploughing all day for? And why? That it may bring forth abundantly. ‘For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach

* Chap. xxviii.

him,' even by His own example. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do," said Fanny, hesitatingly.

"What do I mean?"

"You mean that God uses us as ploughmen use the ground, and ploughs us up with troubles that He may cast in good seed, to grow up and bring forth corn and useful things."

"That's the very thing! And when we *do* begin to bring forth useful things, He sees that His labour was not in vain. Then, when the grain is gathered, what comes next?"

"It is threshed."

"Yes, with large flails. But Isaiah says little things like vetches and cummins are not threshed with flails, which would be needlessly hard for them: a staff or a rod will be sufficient."

"'Thy rod and thy staff,'" put in Fanny.

"Well applied." (By this time he was holding her hand, and she was looking full into his kind, dark, penetrating eyes.) "You are a little vetch, eh?"

"Yes!"—smiling.

"But 'bread corn is *bruised*.' It is more valuable than vetches or cummin; and is worth the trouble, not only of threshing, but of grinding in a mill. And thus, also, doth the Lord of Hosts, who is 'wonderful in counsel (or wisdom), and excellent in working.' He will even grind his people, as in a mill, to get all the good out of them."

"Oh, I see it all now!" cried Fanny, her whole face lighting up. "He has dealt ten-

derly with me, like a little vetch, but he has bruised and ground the Miss Middlemasses like bread corn."

Now, how practical all this was! I no longer wondered that Mr. Barnet was popular in his parish and in his schools. I wished *I* could teach so! But God's purpose to me, at this time, was not that *I* should teach, but be taught, even through the medium of a child. What Mr. Barnet inculcated, in simple phrase, on Fanny, was just as instructive to me. I had felt our path dark, as she had done, and, with words of submission on my lips, had found it hard to submit with my heart. Now, I saw that God had indeed given us the dearest proof of His love, in threshing and grinding us, to be kneaded as bread for the Lord's own table. And "then, —into the oven with it!" says good old Matthew Henry. There is yet a fiery ordeal for His servants to endure, before they are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

But, from this period, I date a totally different and higher feeling throughout the house —a different spirit imbuing the character of every one in the family, and permeating the simplest actions. First, for Jacintha. Dear, excellent creature as she was, there had ever been too great an alloy of this world in her composition. Too fond had she been of questioning, "What will the world think? What will the world say?" The very subjects of inquiry showed too plainly what the world is *in the habit* of thinking and saying. Its thoughts are not very wise, nor its sayings

very kind. But, from this great ordeal, Jacintha's mind seemed to have come forth like gold from the fire, purified of much of its alloy. She had had a sharp discipline; had had long hours of night-watching for communing with her own heart, and seeking to ascertain what spirit she was of; had been brought nearer to the unseen world by following to its very brink the being she loved most dearly upon earth; had, with the gaze of intense affection, sought to pierce its mysteries; had looked around for help, but found none except in God; had sought His, not formally but agonizingly; had found prayer answered, beyond all expectations, equal to all hopes, and had overflowed with lively gratitude. Her experience was that of Job—"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye *seeth* thee!" seeth thee in every walk of life—in every mercy, every duty. And her humbled spirit was, moreover, ready to add, "Wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes."

Moreover, Jacintha had, naturally, been exceedingly self-willed. "I *will* have that done!" "I *insist* upon this!" "I will not endure this!"—"I won't submit to it!"—were no uncommon words with her. Now the lion spirit was chained: her will was bent to His. I say not the lion was slain, or the will annihilated—but I say that "Thy will, *not mine*, be done," was now the prayer of her heart. And a hard heart-prayer it is.

On the whole, when I look back on what Jacintha had been up to the time of our re-

verses and afflictions—first, her disappointment about Mr. Mortlake—then, her undue hastiness and severity in the case of Emma Grove—then, the gall and wormwood of having to encounter at disadvantage the sneering Mrs. Callender and the gruff Mr. Grove—then, the falling off of the school—then, the anxiety of the first weeks of general illness in the house—and then, to crown all and throw every foregone evil into the shade, the distressing illness and expected death of Marian,—when I look back on all this catalogue of griefs, and on what Jacintha had been, and on what she began to be and has gone on being from that sad time,—I feel that *the prize was worth the race* a thousand times! and that were it on her account alone, Marian's illness was a blessing!

But, if to her, how much more so to Marian? She had always been the darling of our hearts—the pride of our eyes—the pet of the house—the beloved of all our friends: but yet, “there is none that sinneth not,” and even Marian required to be tried as silver is tried, seven times in the fire. So pure, so spiritual, had she ever appeared to *us*, that *we*, poor misjudging sinners as we were, could hardly believe our darling required that searching discipline: but surely she knew herself best; and in hours of holy, unfettered confidence, she has since told me that she never knew the depths of her own heart till then, nor had had any adequate idea how much it required cleansing.

In her daily mien, there was less alteration to mark than in Jacintha's, because it had always been, to human eyes, so irreproachable;

but yet, we were all sensible of a difference—we all were conscious, for some time, that, in ministering to her, in communing with her, we were on holy ground. There was a sanctity in her looks, demeanour, and simplest expressions, such as one would think there must have been, in the apostolic times, in those who in the name or by the word of Jesus were raised from the dead. Doubtless, they gradually returned to their ordinary avocations; but, surely, not in their ordinary spirit.

I wish I could report as much good to my worthless self as to my beloved sisters, derived from this corrective dispensation. I think it showed me the greatness of many things commonly considered small, and the smallness of many things commonly accounted great, more forcibly than before. I certainly seemed to acquire a new view of the scope and end of life, and to perceive great deficiencies in a course I had hitherto regarded as tolerably blameless. Altogether, earthly things had paled, and heavenly things had brightened. Moreover, although at the time, my bodily sufferings had been much increased by illness and fatigue, so that it was some time before I altogether shook off my influenza symptoms and recovered from my exertions, yet, in some respects, those exertions and the unavoidable neglect of many old-established habits had done me good. For instance, my lameness was decidedly better: I had stumped up and down stairs and out of one room into another without regard to pain, and now the pain had become very little, and my muscles, forced into use, had regained a power

which I saw no reason for allowing them to lose again. Also I had become careless of sitting in draughts, and of many other old-maidish and invalid habits, which, if indulged in, are apt to get inveterate.

However, there is no good in boasting ; and self-praise is no recommendation. *Laus Deo.*

I must speak a word of Miss Dixon, who had been head schoolmistress all this time, and who had acquired a self-possession and decision of character she never afterwards lost. She was conscious the trial had been beneficial to her, and spoke of it very nicely.

But what shall I say of dear Fanny Ward ? We were afraid of harming her by letting her see how very much we thought of her ; and yet, I believe, it crept out. It may be thought strange that Fanny was not sent home in the first instance : but Mrs. Ward's younger children had the measles, which she was particularly desirous Fanny should escape ; and afterwards, when Fanny had recovered from her own very moderate attack of influenza, there was no question of sending her home ; she herself would have been in despair at the thought of it. When Mrs. Ward was sufficiently relieved from her home anxieties to come and see how we were, she was much shocked to hear all we had gone through, and much affected and pleased to hear how excellently Fanny had behaved, and how she had shown the forethought and sense of a woman, and been a real help and comfort to me. I told Mrs. Ward that though it was a discipline neither of us would willingly have exposed her

to, I believed it had ripened her best qualities and deepened her religious feelings in a way that would benefit her during the remainder of her life. Mrs. Ward took my view of it, and even thanked me for letting Fanny be of use to me instead of confining her to the school-room, saying—

“After all, Miss Middlemass, what is it that these children are training for but the duties of active life? and how much less important is it that they should have a few lessons more or less in music and French, than that they should have their wits about them, and know how to act in times of sickness and danger?”

Fanny heard these concluding words, which I was not sorry for; and they were accompanied by an affectionate kiss. John remained a couple of days at the “White Hart,” to be quite sure that Marian was really out of danger, and then returned to town. He saw Mr. Barnet twice, and was very much pleased with him—pronounced him “gentlemanlike,” without which there could be no door to John’s liking; and “scholar-like,” which was a great claim on John’s respect. He said he was “unaffectedly pious, without any stuff;” and that, too, was a great thing for John to say.

I was easy enough in my mind to feel pleasure in John’s dining with us the second day; and a long chat with him in the evening refreshed me as much, or more, than a nap. We were very friendly and confidential. I gave him our statistics, which he seemed

satisfied with ; and he, in return, told me that he was getting on in business pretty well—not *too* well. I thought it implied he was glad not to have the whole, or part maintenance of three sisters on his hands.

“ By the by, Isabella,” cried he, after a pause, “ what an unfortunate business that was of Jacintha’s about Mr. Mortlake ! All owing to this unlucky school.”

“ All owing to her own want of candour, I am afraid,” said I.

“ Oh, that’s absurd,” said John. “ There was no occasion for her going about proclaiming herself a schoolmistress. I, for one, should not have put up with it. If the school had not existed, the dilemma could never have occurred.”

“ That is *undeniable*,” said I ; and I was ready to ask how we should have been supported without it, or how we could have foreseen Mr. Mortlake’s appearance on the stage, but I forbore.

“ Capital fellow, Mortlake,” pursued John, shifting his position in the easy-chair.

“ What is he like ?” said I, with assumed indifference.

“ Oh, he’s a fine figure of a man, as people say—tall, strongly built, but not too much so—dark, with dark hair and whiskers ; good eyes, good brow, nose slightly aquiline—age about thirty to thirty-five : not too old, you know, for Jacintha.”

“ Dear me, no,” said I. “ It was a great pity. But you have only spoken of his looks. What of his character ? His temper is rather quick, I should be afraid.”

"Really I don't think so ; and if it were, so is Jacintha's."

"Yes ; but two hot tempers don't work well together. *One* side should be yielding."

"Well, it may be so : but, at any rate, I don't believe Mortlake has an uncomfortable temper, by any means. He is a very companionable, sensible, pleasant fellow."

"Well principled ?"

"Well, I can only say he's a good deal stricter than I am," said John, laughing lightly. "One of the men who always go to church on Sundays, at home or abroad, whether with a lady or not. Curious in his taste for good preaching, too—would rather walk five miles to church, than hear a prosy sermon near home, when a good one was to be had."

"So would I, I'm sure, if I could," said I, sighing at the remembrance of Dr. Hook's Moral Essays, sleepily delivered, and Mr. Whipster's pert, epigrammatic effusions.

"Your Mr. Barnet, now, would suit him, I should fancy," said John. "Is not he a fine preacher ?"

"I never heard him but once, when he preached for a local charity. I liked him very much. He is very much admired and beloved, I understand, in his own parish—the 'guide, philosopher, and friend' of rich and poor."

"Just so. He seems one of the few clergy whom I could wish for a friend. Mortlake should have been in the church. He says

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he's not good enough. At any rate, he's a very good man of business."

"He is a partner in a bank in Lombard Street, is not he?" said I.

"Yes: junior partner. Oh, he must be very well off. His family, too, decidedly respectable. Very well connected. Altogether, it was a vexatious business that the match did not come off. Jacintha will never have such another chance—probably never marry. Who is there here, you know? And she does not go anywhere else. It was a pity she refused coming to us this winter: she is now not so young as she was, and, though still a very fine woman, is growing older every year. Isabella, these are very capital coals of yours. How much are they the ton?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Close to the window, sister dear,
Place now my easy-chair ;—
How exquisite, to breathe again
The summer's balmy air !
How lovely are the trees and flowers,
Gay birds sing merrily,
And everywhere this world of ours
In gladness smiles on me !

"Father ! I come," my spirit said,
"I hear thy gracious voice,
And gladly will I make henceforth
Thy sacred ways my choice.
I now can bless the chastening rod
In mercy sent to me,
To make me live henceforth for God,
And for eternity."

S. B., *The Invalid Restored.*

WHEN Mr. Barnet came to us next, was to bring Mary to us, to stay long as she could be of any use or comfort.

Dear Mary ! she had already matured wonderfully, both in person and mind ; her home-experience had made her womanly in self-possession and in action ; and constant intercourse with, and *reaching up to*, a well-stored, intellectual mind like her father's, had made her a most intelligent companion.

Marian was just in the state to benefit by her affectionate cares, and enjoy snatches of her conversation ; while Jacintha and I, who

had so long been detached from the general affairs of the house, were truly thankful for a substitute on whom we could depend whenever we were drawn away by necessary demands on our time. Jacintha now resumed her place in the school-room, and summoned Fanny thither; and the snow having at length given place to a thaw, and then to clear, frosty weather, she and the poor pent-up children were able to get fresh air and exercise, which was beneficial to her as well as to them.

In fact, Jacintha, who had borne incredible fatigues with unsparring self-devotion, while Marian was in danger, now felt it her duty to resign the chief charge of her to me, with my valuable assistant Mary Barnet. But Marian's state was still very critical: indeed, far more so than we had first supposed. Her delirium still recurred at night, and though it was of a harmless, rambling kind, yet Mr. Herne told me, as long as it lasted, there must still be a pressure on the brain. We expected, when once she had survived the crisis, to see her strength and appetite revive with the rapidity of a Russian spring, when the buds may almost be seen to burst, and the flowers spring up in a night. But this was far from being the case; her appetite was very capricious; sometimes it was craving, and she could hardly wait to have her food prepared; at other times, nothing could tempt her—not even Mrs. Meade's exquisite jellies, delicate little fancy-loaves, or concentrated essences of meat. I must say that nothing could equal the sym-

pathy of our friends and neighbours, except their bounty—they thought nothing too good for Marian. Mr. Meade sent her his choicest wine, Mrs. Meade sent her fancy-bread, butter, new-laid eggs, fruit, jellies—others sent game, poultry, even venison: there was no end to the ways in which kindness expressed itself. It was particularly gratifying to Jacintha, keenly alive to the reproach of our school having fallen off, as it showed how many friends and supporters we had left. Mrs. Forsyth, even, sent—*cards!*

We were as much disappointed in Marian's strength as her appetite. The least noise had an almost insupportable effect on her nerves: she could sit up very little, and when she did, she could very little bear being spoken to. John frequently wrote, "How *is* it Marian does not get better?" and no one could tell him. "There must be something wrong," he added; but no one could say where it was.

There was a quietude about Mary Barnet that made her just the help we wanted. She would sit beside Marian without wanting to talk or fidget. Always at leisure to obey a look or a word, she never seemed anxiously on the watch for them, but serenely occupied with her own thoughts till the very moment she was wanted. And then her touch was so light, her tread was so light, her voice so soft! No unnaturally constrained softness, no stealthy cat-like movements, no rustle or bustle, but always so pleasant. I learnt to think her quite pretty, and should have been surprised and hurt to hear any one call her plain.

As Marian was able, little by little, to hear more of her gentle voice, Mary would read to her occasionally, sometimes a few Bible verses or a hymn, sometimes only a few lines from a certain little note-book of hers, which she set great store by, it being enriched with chosen *morceaux* that particularly pleased her. Such, for instance, as—

“‘Surely, this must be the chariot sent to fetch me !’ said a dying Christian of her disease. ‘How easy it is !’”

Or this—

“Showy minds are insincere ; strong ones, never.”

Or—

“With faith in God, action is happiness.”

To which Marian, too weak to follow the subject in words, would say, “ah !” or “hem !” and muse a little till she closed her eyes, as if too tired to think. One day, she was so much pleased with these lines, by Miss Roberton, of Teignmouth, that she asked for them a second time, and I begged Mary to copy them out for me :—

“Welcome thy gentle scourge, thou precious Lord ;
Small are the cords thy love hath intertwined,
And light the stroke. I own the just award
Of stripes, when in thy temple thou dost find
Unmeet intruders, traffickers abhorred,
That grieve thy loving spirit’s gracious mind,
Making the holy place where thou shouldst reign
Alone, a den of earthliness again.

“Thou wilt destroy this temple ; for within
A fretting leprosy is on the walls,
Nor can the plague-spot of indwelling sin
Be purified, until the fabric falls ;

And though, at times, to feel thy work begin
Dismays the sinking flesh, yet faith recalls
The blessed hope, that, as thy word is true,
Thou wilt return, and build it up anew."

I will add one more little piece, not on account of its poetical merit, but because there is something in it which touched our hearts. Mary told us she copied it out of a magazine :—

" Was it the Saviour's voice ? Methought it woke
Amid a choir of angels ; and He spoke !—
He spoke to welcome one just come from earth,
Called him to triumph in his heavenly birth ;
But bade him now by memory's power retrace
The way that led to heaven's bright dwelling-place.
'O, thou art safe at last ; I loved thee so,
I *died* for thee !—I would not let thee go !
But tell me, now that thou art safe above,
Why didst thou ever doubt thy Saviour's love ?
Why was one fear, one thought of anguish thine ?
Was not mine arm almighty and divine ?
Why didst thou,—heir of mansions in the skies,
Chosen ere long to spread thy wing and rise,—
Why didst thou listen to the worldling's song,
And all but join the trifling, festive throng ?
Nay, tremble not—I do not chide thee now,
Ransomed and safe in my own heaven art thou ;
But hadst thou with yet firmer faith relied
On Him who lived for thee, for thee who died,
The spirit of adoption I had given,
Till thou hadst lived on earth the life of heaven :
I would have sheltered thee, and not a care
And not a sorrow need have grieved thee there !'
Who will apply the lesson ? Who will give
All glory to the Lord, and with him live ?
Now, even now, his offered love embrace,
And taste, on earth, the riches of his grace !"

Mary Barnet was with us about three weeks ; and when she returned to Meadowley, it was

on the understanding that Marian, if well enough, should accompany me thither at Easter, to spend a week or fortnight.

This Meadowley, according to Mary, with its breezy commons dappled with pools, its thatched cottages with their rose-trees, apple-trees, and bee-hives, its prosperous farms, scattered country-seats, ivy-grown church, and parsonage mantled with jessamine, was the sweetest place—quite like one of Miss Mitford's charming villages; and its farmers, farmers' wives, farmers' daughters, its ploughmen, cricketers, and poachers, were quite like Miss Mitford's characters. Mary, in her quiet, pleasant way, described one after another of these worthies, touching and re-touching till she quite worked them up into little cabinet pictures. It charmed Marian, who would say from time to time, "Tell me some more of Tim Jellicoe's quaint sayings;" "Let me hear what became of Kitty Clover;" "How did Jem Brookes turn out, after all the pains your father took with him?" "What became of widow Green's little orphans?" "How did you manage for a schoolmistress?" "How came you to visit Betsy Neale?" and many similar inquiries, all of which Mary was delighted to answer.

And, while her sole aim was to show us how good a mother was one, how dutiful a daughter another, how patient a sufferer a third, how repentant a misdoer a fourth, I could not but make my private remarks that Mary herself seemed the friend, counsellor, and comforter of all. But she never intended to convey this impression. She loved to dwell on her father's

praises, and tell of all the good he did and the happiness he conferred, and what a delightful companion he was to her during the long winter evenings; and how, when he was not talking, she loved to hear the scratch of his pen while he wrote, or for each of them to enjoy their books, in companionable silence. If Mary had been very cunning in her endeavours to excite our wishes to judge of the attractions of Meadowley for ourselves, she could not have had better success.

We were very sorry to lose her, but we were half-way through Lent, and Easter would soon be at hand—quite soon enough for Marian, who had only been out twice for a very few minutes in Mrs. Meade's close carriage. Marian's grand object was to get to church, which she accomplished one week-day; but she became hysterical before the prayers were ended, and I was obliged to lead her out. The girls had now resumed their practising, which Jacintha persuaded herself could not be heard up in Marian's room; but she was mistaken—it tried Marian's nerves greatly, and when I saw the tears course her pale cheeks, I longed all the more for Easter.

It came at last: Jacintha, generously forgetful of self, thought nothing of passing the short vacation in solitude—she should enjoy it, she said. She should practise her noisiest pieces without remorse, and enjoy quite a feast of light reading during the long evenings, and lie in bed as long as she liked every morning, and copy a great deal of music, and do a great many things she had been unable to find time

for all the winter. Nor were we to hurry ourselves in returning from Meadowley after Easter if we were pressed to stay. She should get on admirably with the three girls, and was quite able now to rejoice in the number of scholars being so limited, though she should be glad to get the school up again to the old number when Marian was quite well. Therefore Marian must make it her duty to do so as fast as she could, by eating and drinking, and being in the open air, and enjoying herself in every way as much as possible.

Kind Jacintha! It was delightful to witness her sunny look as she stood in the doorway to see us drive off. Mr. Barnet had a nice four-wheeled chaise, but we thought it best to perform the ten miles' journey in a close carriage, the easiest we could find.

So we soberly drove out of the straggling town-end, and along the rectory wall and park-paling, and so into the open country, over undulating downs that now and then afforded glimpses of villages, and church towers and spires. We were both very easily excited to cheerfulness by new scenery, and I had hardly caught sight of the yellow furze and purple mallows on the common, before my spirits began to rise.

"Look," said I, "there are some gipsies in that dry water-course. What a singular people they are! and what an eye for the picturesque they always have! Do you remember our uncle Middlemass's old house in Surrey, on the banks of the Mole? That river is remarkable for swelling or running shallow with very little

apparent cause. I remember, one Sunday, we were all crossing the rustic wooden bridge on our way to church, when we observed a party of gipsies pitching their tent in the very bed of the river, which was perfectly dry, and looked very romantic between its precipitous, gravelly banks, clothed with tangled bushes. On our return from church, the river was brawling along its course—the gipsies, of course, had decamped."

"I wonder they were not clever enough to foresee what would happen," said Marian.

"Probably they would have been, with regard to any less unaccountable river. There was a very sharp, awkward turn of the high road just at the foot of that bridge. One night, when I was staying with my aunt and uncle, we were alarmed by a loud barking of the watch-dog, and on opening a window, heard distant cries of 'help! help!' proceeding from the verge of the pleasure-grounds. We thought somebody was being robbed or murdered—the night was very dark: my aunt did not like my uncle going to the rescue, but he was resolved on it, and sallied forth—

‘Close buttoned to the chin,
Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within;’

attended by his man Thomas with a lanthorn. I don't think he armed himself with any more formidable weapon than an umbrella. The evening was quite warm, though dark, and my aunt and I, impelled by fear for my uncle and curiosity, put our shawls over our heads,

and stole after him. As we drew nearer the bridge the cries of 'help! help!' grew louder, prompted, probably, by the hope of assistance afforded by the glimmer of Thomas's lanthorn. On reaching the brink of the Mole, the mystery was explained:—a gentleman's coachman, unacquainted with the neighbourhood, was driving home his master's empty carriage from a dinner party, and missing the turning, had driven unawares into the bed of the river. Hearing the water splash, and not knowing how shallow it was, he thought it best to pull up and shout for assistance."

"Discretion was the better part of valour there," said Marian. "There ought to have been a beautiful young lady in the carriage, to be rescued by a younger hero than uncle Middlemass."

"The neighbourhood was not without its romance," said I. "One night, the post-boy, trotting along with his letter-bags, was shot at from behind the hedge: it was never known by whom, though Captain Bolton heard the report in his grounds, and the boy galloped up to the lodge as white as death, and ready to drop from his horse."

"Do you think it might have been some poacher, who had a spite against Captain Bolton, and meant to shoot *him*?"

"Then why shoot the post-boy?" said I, sapiently. "What a pretty heath this is, Marian! It reminds me of Bewick's vignette of a wild common, with a post-chaise driving furiously along its verge, and a gibbet in the distance."

"Enough to make the post-chaise drive furiously, I think!" said Marian.

"Perhaps so; but, my dear Marian, travelling was vastly different in the last generation to what it is now. Think of our great-aunt and uncle Hugh being attacked by highwaymen on Shooter's Hill, within sight of a turnpike!"

"How was that?" inquired Marian.

"Aunt Hugh," said I, "had a scapegrace brother, who ran away to sea, and went to Sierra Leone. There was a strange mortality on board the ship on its homeward voyage, and, when it reached Portsmouth, the mate wrote a few lines to my aunt, to say that if she wished to see her brother alive, she must lose no time in going to Portsmouth. So she and my uncle started at once, in a post-chaise, and just as they were slowly creeping up Shooter's Hill—in full sight of the turnpike—my uncle enjoying a nap—'Your money or your life!' cries a hoarse voice, at the same moment that a pistol was fired through the window. My uncle, sputtering and choking with the smoke, and wounded all over the face with the gunpowder (of which he bore the unseemly marks to his grave), gave up his watch and purse, but my aunt had secreted hers, and no threats could induce her to surrender them. Another post-chaise appearing in the distance, the highwaymen, with an oath, galloped off, leaving my aunt half dead with fear, and my uncle's face streaming with blood and grievously smarting. The highwayman's pistol had been loaded with ball, but the ball had dropped out, owing to his holding the

weapon slanting, doubtless to avoid wounding his comrade at the other window. It was found afterwards at the bottom of the chaise, and preserved by my aunt as a relic. When they reached the turnpike-gate the turnpike-man pretended to have seen and heard nothing of the occurrence, but my uncle was convinced he connived at it."

"So that was the way uncle Hugh got his purple face!" cried Marian. "Did my aunt find her brother alive?"

"Really, that is a particular I never thought of inquiring," said I.

Just then a horseman, rather quaintly apparelled and mounted, passed us at an easy canter, and gaining a little hillock between high banks of sand, seemed on the look-out for something or some one.

"How very exciting!" said Marian, laughing. "Surely, Isabella, we are about to fall into an ambuscade!"

In fact, we had fallen in with Astley's equestrian troupe on one of its country progresses; and a curious procession it made. First, the scout aforesaid. Then a couple of riders, giving themselves the airs of a brace of lancers. Then the clown, on a piebald horse. Then a mixed multitude of riders, all as silent as if they were pictures. Then a caravan full of women, children, and properties, with one or two gay banners and streamers. To the back of this van, two or three diminutive ponies were attached, that, doubtless, played very important parts in the circle. Their attractions seemed enhanced by paint: at

least, I never saw such variegated horse-hides without it. Slowly behind came a wagon drawn by eight horses, and packed with the heavy lumber. Lastly, another solitary rider. The whole *cortège* had a burlesque and romantic state.

We passed one another three times:—first, they passed us, ascending the hill; secondly, we passed them as they were baiting at a little wayside hostelry at the hill foot; lastly, they passed us again, one of them winding a mellifluous charge on the bugle—not

“That wild horn
On Fontarabian echoes borne,”

that was heard sixty miles off. This was a keyed bugle.

CHAPTER XIX.

See the wretch that long has tost,
On the thorny bed of pain,
Again repair his vigour lost,
And walk and run again.
The meanest flow'ret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common air, the earth, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise !

GRAY.

MARIAN looked around her with delight. "How sweet and fresh the air is over this heath!" said she. "Why should Goldsmith have called the furze blossom 'unprofitably gay'?" It is sweet to the eye, sweet to the smell—like burnt cocoa-nut shell, I think!—and, if it gratifies two senses, we need not call it unprofitable."

"He was not much of a utilitarian, neither," said I. "One would have fancied him fonder of vagrant blooms than of a potatoe patch."

"He wanted to tag a rhyme, that was all," said Marian. "Gay rhymes with way, and so he said the furze was unprofitably gay."

"You know all about it, I dare say, as you write verses sometimes," said I, slyly.

"I?" said Marian, colouring a little. "Oh, a little hymn or two, that's all. No, not quite all," added she, truthfully, after ruminating

a little ; "but it's no matter of any one's but mine, I think."

"Oh, it's a feather in your cap, *I think*," said I.

"I know you don't, seriously," said Marian ; "or, if you do—See, there are primroses in the cleft of that warm bank ! and germander speedwell ! That looks like spring, does not it?"

"Spring is fairly here now," said I, "though rather backward. The horse-chestnut buds are beginning to open in Dr. Hook's shrubbery. In ten days the swallows will return."

"From whence?" said Marian. "Ah, that's what nobody knows ! I wonder whether Mr. Barnet has 'Knapp's Journal of a Naturalist.' If not, I could lend it to him, you know. He would be sure to like it."

I enjoyed hearing her talk in this desultory way, but did not encourage sustained conversation, as I feared her expending all her strength before she reached the journey's end. She became very weary towards its close, leant her head against the back of the carriage, and closed her eyes. At length, when I quietly said, "There's the windmill," she started and roused herself, saying, "Is there ? then we must be close on Meadowley. Mary said the windmill was only a little way from the village."

And soon we were traversing the straggling village street, and passing the quaint old church and neat school-houses. In another minute, we were at the little green gate of the pretty parsonage, with its diamond-bright lattices gleaming amid the old walls of time-stained

red brick, woven over with the intricate network of branches as yet only budding, that would soon be bursting into leaves and flowers. A large white cat was sunning itself on a window-ledge, and a little white lap-dog, already familiar to us by the name of Shock, set up a shrill bark at the open door, but was unceremoniously silenced by Mr. Barnet, who removed him by the nape of the neck into some unseen place of durance; while Mary, all smiles, came out to the gate to welcome us, and supported Marian up the little slope with her arm round her waist.

Mr. Barnet, after a few words of cordial welcome, kindly left us to ourselves, and Marian was glad to avail herself of our recommendation to lie down at once on her white-curtained bed in the quaint pretty room which Mary assured us she had occupied for some nights, that we might be under no apprehension of damp. A cheerful fire was burning in the grate; everything was orderly, fresh, and well-appointed, and I saw at once that Mary knew how to regulate a well-ordered house.

When I had accomplished our little unpacking, and smoothly placed our things in the empty drawers and wardrobe, I sat down by the bedroom fire with Mary, and chatted with her, Marian listening to all, though with closed eyes. Afterwards, Mary begged me to excuse her for a few minutes; adding that her father was gone out, so that I need not hurry down. I was glad to be left in quiet a little, especially as I soon observed that Marian was asleep. I rested myself in the comfortable chintz-covered

easy-chair, and gazed on the history of Joseph pourtrayed on the Dutch tiles of the fire-place, and the Chinese tumblers on the chimney-piece, and the engraving of the trial of John Huss over the mantel-shelf, till I believe I dozed too.

At length a very clerical-toned, deep-sounding clock slowly struck, and warned Marian and me that we were within half an hour of dinner. So then she sat up, and I smoothed her hair, and helped her to dress, and put a few finishing touches to my own toilette, and then we went down together.

It was such a pretty, quaint little place!—and, as Marian said, “full of surprises.” Your ideas of the ground plan of the house continually proved erroneous: there were steps up and steps down; odd turnings and corners, all converted into useful places for neat or ornamental purposes. Even awkward beams and posts, ugly ledges or queer nooks, by being coaxed and applied to something for which they never were originally intended, yielded obedience to the hand of taste. The umbrella-corner, the garden-bonnet closet, the dried-seed shelf, the string-bag, the newspaper-box, all confessed that “order is heaven’s first law.” As for Mary’s store-closet, and clothes-presses, her kitchen, dairy, and safe,—the fairy Order would certainly have found no exercise for her wand in them.

Mary had nice servants, too: steady, middle-aged women, that had been trained by her mother; and a quick, well-spoken, quiet, young man-servant. Her father’s study was not as

tidy as she would have liked it, but as tidy as she could make it—truth to say, it was littered with books and papers; but yet it looked comfortable withal. The little drawing-room had a very pretty view of the church, and was well and tastefully furnished; the dining-room was less cheerful, but very snug.

And now we were joined by Mr. Barnet, fresh from his toilette, in as much company-trim as he ever affected, and looking quite the clergyman, though without any clerical foppery, which is, I think, the worst foppery of all. After a few minutes' chat, dinner was announced: he gave me his arm, while Mary passed hers round Marian. It was quite a pleasure to see Mary do the honours of the table: so self-possessed and attentive without being obtrusive; and carving so neatly and quickly, without being obliged to pause in conversation. Then, the potatoes were their own growth, the poultry their own rearing, the bread their own making, the beer their own brewing, and all excellent of their kind. The sea-kale and rhubarb, indeed, were the gift of an affluent neighbour who had forcing-houses. But Mr. Barnet farmed his own glebe and grew his own corn.

“Papa,” said Mary, “John tells me we have nearly finished the golden-balls, and must soon begin on the early-showers. You will be glad but I shall be sorry, for I like waxy potatoes.”

“We ought not to be out of golden-balls yet,” said Mr. Barnet. “Besides, I must save some for planting, and I promised a few

to William Coates, so I am afraid you will soon be reduced to floury potatoes."

"What pretty names potatoes have," said Marian. "Pretty enough for flowers."

"Oh, they have other pretty names besides golden-balls and early-showers," said Mr. Barnet; and he ran over the names of several.

"I have brought home quite a *new* newspaper to-day," said he, presently. "Only two days old! I seldom get one younger than four. But by getting them regularly, you know, I fare as well as my neighbours. It rather throws me out, when I have a paper thus early—to-morrow my paper will seem stale, that would otherwise have contented me!"

"Cannot you put this away, then, till the day after to-morrow?" suggested I.

"No, Miss Middlemass, no! I am not philosophical enough for that—especially as there is Indian news in it. Do you care for Indian news?"

"Not much," said I.

"Ah, if you had a brother in India, it would make all the difference. Not that the news this paper contains is likely to concern him. But it is about a country he inhabits, a people familiar to him. Mary, Mr. Thompson gave me a new book (a new *old* book, that is) for our lending library—'The Life of Lord Clive.'"

"Who do you think will read it, papa?" said Mary. "I don't believe our people are up to it."

"Well, I have my doubts myself—and yet

Clive's history is brilliant and romantic: the worst is, the writer has not let facts speak for themselves, but has given them a twist—and I'm afraid a wrong twist. No; I *hope* it's a wrong twist, because I should not like it to be right."

"Why so?"

"He makes a hero of him. Now, Clive (between ourselves) is not one of my heroes at all. A passionate schoolboy, an intractable youth, his *genius* was great, I grant you, and his defence of Arcot was one of the most splendid things of its kind ever achieved. At five-and-twenty, you know, with a hundred and twenty Europeans and two hundred Sepoys, he successfully held a ruinous, ill-fortified post fifty days against ten thousand men. That was a great thing. When he commenced offensive operations, he was equally successful. He returned to England in the flush of his young glory, to wear his well-earned laurels. And then he returned to India, to acquire new fame, amass enormous wealth—and commit enormous crimes."

"Could not you give us a lecture about him in the school-room, papa?" said Mary.

"Well, Polly, if I do, you must abridge the details for me."

"Oh, yes!"

"And I'll undertake the moralizing. Yes; I think I might draw a useful lesson from his treacherous conduct to Omichund. It was enough to make our name abhorred throughout the land. But, at the time, new victories led to new honours; and then he returned to

display his spoils, and reap his reward at home.”

“A bitter reward it was,” said I.

“Who ever displayed his spoils and vaunted his successes,” said Mr. Barnet, “without provoking envy, hatred, or malice? His life was like the troubled sea, whose waves cast up mire and dirt. He frequently attempted self-destruction, and, finally, died by his own hand, at the age of forty-nine. He was the Moloch as Hastings was the Mammon of our Indian history. Have you read Clive’s *Life*, Miss Middlemass?”

“Yes,” said I. “It is superb; but I felt as fatigued after reading it as if I had been spending a long day in an oriental palace, filled only with embroidered shawls, elephants’ tusks, and gold muslins.”

“I am afraid, papa,” said Mary, “that you have been reading on horseback again. White-star will get his foot into a rabbit-hole or stumble over a mole-hill, some of these days, and I shall not feel very much obliged to the ‘little gentleman in black velvet.’”

“Well,” said he, laughing, “I did yield to the temptation, I own—the downs were so lonely.”

“And you know them so well, I suppose,” said I, “that they have lost their charm.”

“I can hardly say that,” said Mr. Barnet. “They are favourable to an objective, though still more to a subjective train of thought—(to use two cant words of the day). Are you a disciple of *Cant*, Miss Marian? or are you an admirer of poetry? I can see you are! Your

favourite poet? 'So many!' Oh, but surely there must be one pre-eminent. Wordsworth? Ay, he is mine, next to Shakspere and Milton. And I dare say you remember his description of the train of thoughts suggested to him by a heap of stones near Esthwaite, piled by a man sick of the world, who would sit there for hours, visited only by straggling sheep, or perhaps a stone-chat or sandpiper?"

"No," said Marian. "It is in the 'Excursion,' I suppose. I like his shorter pieces best."

"Perhaps I do too; but the 'Excursion' is very fine. That description of his, for instance, to which I have just referred, always comes to my mind when I pass a certain pile of stones on our downs. The man, he says, gazed on the beautiful scene before him with a heart so lorn and cheerless from too constant introspection, that its charms only led to tears. And then Wordsworth finely adds—

"The man, whose eye
Is ever on himself, doth look on one
The least of Nature's works!"

"I am trying to acquire a taste for Wordsworth," said Mary to me, smiling, "because papa is so fond of him."

It was just like her. I could see she was endeavouring to assimilate her tastes to his in everything, and yet she frankly declared her own where they differed, and argued and joked with him quite fearlessly.

We spent the evening very quietly. Mr. Barnet was called away to baptize a newly-

born child, and we enjoyed a feminine gossip, and then Marian went to bed early. Mary made tea afresh, in a diminutive tea-pot that held just enough for one, when her father returned; and then, after a nice chat, we had family prayers, and retired to rest. Marian was not delirious that night: the chain was broken.

She took the whole of the next day to recover from her journey; the greater part of it in bed. As it was a rainy morning, her loss was less; and she would not let me sit much with her, so that I had much conversation, that really deserved the name, with Mary, who had many serious affairs to consult me about. She said she had no companion of her own age in the neighbourhood; and no older female friend to apply to in any emergency, except Mrs. Webb, of Oakfield; and Mrs. Webb was often from home.

It seemed a solitary life for this young girl to lead! But she certainly did not find it dull: only, she said, she sometimes felt the want of an experienced female friend to advise her in things that were out of her father's province.

Afterwards, when I was sitting with Marian, she came up and said the weather had brightened, and her father was wanting to show me his schools: if I would go with him, she would take care of Marian the while. So I equipped myself, and started with Mr. Barnet—he, keeping a little in advance, which was a way of his, I think he was hardly conscious of. People who lead secluded lives, often fall into these little eccentricities.

Everything looked fresh and sparkling with the recent raindrops now glittering in the sun. There was much to interest in the village and in the schools, where the girls, who underwent a close examination, seemed very well taught by a rather superior young woman of about seven-and-twenty. The boys, likewise, seemed fortunate in their teacher, a young Scotchman, who appeared both shrewd and kind.

After this, Mr. Barnet beguiled me into accompanying him to visit one or two cottages; and when we left them, he consulted me about certain improvements he meditated. Then I found he had the key of the church in his pocket, and would be disappointed if I did not let him show me the interior of the church, which had a curious fresco on one of the walls, lately discovered under the whitewash, and restored. He showed me some fine oak carving, which had also been embedded in plaster till he and Mary had set to work to pick it out with their penknives. It had occupied many a long hour, and might occupy many more. In this way, we made out our time till within half an hour of dinner. But I must not omit to mention the warm manner in which he expressed his thanks to me and my sisters, for having helped to make Mary what she was—the ornament of her home, and the comfort of his life.

On our return, we found Mary had dressed Marian, and brought her down into the drawing-room, where she was lying on the couch near the fire, looking very pale but very contented. Mary would not have her join us at

dinner, but insisted on sending her dinner in to her, as she was sure the fatigue of sitting up to table had been too much for her the previous day.

Marian was not yet well enough to bear music, therefore Mary, at a hint from me, forbore to play. Instead of that, our evening recreation was supplied by Mr. Barnet, who read aloud a clever magazine tale with great spirit. It was just one of those little things that amuse the passing hour, and are never thought of afterwards.

I am sorry to say, Marian's delirium returned at night, though not painfully or for long. The next day, she went round the garden and along the church-path in a wheel-chair that had been used by Mary's mother. Every day she did a little more; and every day we had the cheering hope that a little ground had been gained: but yet she looked so delicate that there seemed but too much reason to fear that this trying illness of hers might terminate in a decline. I could see Mr. Barnet thought so: I saw, or fancied I could see him tracing his wife's early symptoms in Marian: there was such a look of concern, amounting almost to care, on his brow, when he looked at her! Sometimes, I thought it was because she occupied his wife's couch, and his wife's chair.

He endeavoured to enliven her by harmless pleasantry, and succeeded: but, at times, spoke to her, and in her presence, with a seriousness peculiarly suitable to a person whose illness appeared unlikely to end in recovery,

yet with nothing gloomy or dispiriting in what he said. It was of inestimable benefit to Marian. He said just the things that I should have liked to say, but could not: and they came with more authority from him. She took them so nicely! not contenting herself with merely assenting, but brooding over them afterwards and converting them into real spiritual aliment. One morning, when I awoke, I found her with her eyes wide open, and a look of such sedate satisfaction on her face, that I could not help asking her what she was thinking about. She said—

“I was thinking how wonderful it seemed to have been privileged to have anything to do with the education of Mary Barnet. She was with us six months only; and yet she attributes to those six months more substantive good than in previous years. This is owing to *you*, Isabella, and to Jacintha; though she insists on attributing some of her good influences to me.”

I said, “Example teaches. I had very little to do with her in comparison with you and Jacintha. We all did our best; and the soil was so well prepared that whatever good seed was cast into it took root and brought forth abundantly.”

“It seems so strange,” pursued Marian, still musing, “when I was eighteen and she seventeen, there seemed a little difference between us; but now that her birthday has passed and mine has not come, we are both eighteen together!”

“And she looks it,” said I. “Mary has

become very womanly, and is quite competent to take charge of a house of her own—though I don't see much present chance of her having one."

"Why cannot you be content with things as they are?" said Marian. "She is; and has every reason to be so, I think!"

So I was silenced.

CHAPTER XX.

Next to mine own beloved so long,
I have not spent my heart in vain ;—
I watched the blade, I see the grain,—
A woman's soul, most soft, yet strong.

KINGSLEY.

INSTEAD of returning home at the end of ten days, we remained three weeks. I would gladly have then left Marian behind me, for she was still very weak; and her delirium, I am sorry to say, still continued—not every night, but most nights; and I knew while this was the case, she ought not to return to the scene of duty.

Still, she was not conscious of the symptom herself, and, believing herself better than she was, she longed to relieve Jacintha of part of her cares. But Jacintha told her plainly that she would not allow her to do so, even if she came home; and reminded her of what was really the case, that the charge of the five girls who were now our only pupils was not more arduous than that of many a private governess; and that, if we did not get the school up to something like its former number, there would be no need to keep Miss Dixon.

Marian and I, therefore, stayed a second and third week; and during this period she was able to receive the sacrament, and to

attend two or three short week-day services. But on Sunday, when the organ played, she could not bear it; and the unsuccessful experiment made her very unwell all the afternoon, and delirious at night. We were obliged to go on *pian'-piano*. Meanwhile she made progress, and lost her anxious look, and liked Mr. Barnet's conversations, and readings, and church ministrations: she often said, "It is a *privilege* to be here—oh, what shall we do when we return to Dr. Hook?" As for myself, being able to get about more than I had done for some years, and being supposed to be more locomotive than I really was, I had a pride and pleasure in keeping up to the mark as much as I could; and astonished myself as much as Marian by what I achieved. She said, smiling, she wished Mr. Barnet could make her walk as well as he made me.

Sometimes, in the evening, we had long, confidential talks with him and Mary about our school affairs. We told them, unreservedly, of the false step that had been taken with Emma Grove; of the trouble we had had about Margaret Forest, and the injury that had ensued from the enmity of Mrs. Callender, which, Mr. Herne had told us, spread far and wide. I asked Mr. Barnet what he thought we could or should do to counteract her evil reports. He thought that it would have been better, in the first instance, to write a plain statement of facts to the parents of each girl; but that now, as a little time had passed, the evil would probably blow over, and we should live it down and refute calumny by our own

judicious conduct and the restored popularity of the school. I thought he gave us a great deal of valuable advice by taking for granted we were going to do many things that were, in fact, his suggestions. We ended by agreeing that if the scandals continued and spread, they must be stopped; but that it would be wisest to act with deliberation, and, if possible, not stir in the matter at all.

What pleased me very much was the way in which Mr. Barnet spoke of Jacintha. This must have been owing to Mary, for he had seen very little of her himself; but he seemed to have an intuitive perception of the nobler features of her character, and to sympathize with her in the pain she must feel at having hastily condemned an innocent person. He said he was sure she would recover the school; and spoke so encouragingly of it, that though he knew no more of the future than I did, I felt hopeful myself.

All that impressed and encouraged me, took yet greater effect on Marian's impressible mind; so that it came to pass she steadfastly resolved to return home at the three weeks' end, animated with vivid hopes of what she *could*, and with strong resolutions what she *would* do.

So we took leave of our kind friends one sunny morning in April, when the bees were humming over the blossoms, and the barley and beans were beginning to peer above ground, and the hawthorn-hedges wore a pale, thin mantle of green. The rooks clamouring in the tall trees, and the lark loudly singing

over our heads, added to the cheerfulness of the rural scene we were leaving, and the last glimpse we had of the father and daughter standing at their green gate, was one to dwell on with pleasure.

Jacintha was very glad to have us back once more, though she said she wished we had remained longer at Meadowley; and she saw so much improvement in Marian that both Marian and I were elated by it. We talked a great deal of our pleasant visit, and Marian was quite cheerful and playful; and spoke sanguinely of being soon able to do as much as ever. Alas, she was more than usually delirious that night!

In short, this symptom continued, though in all other respects, she was better; and, on my mentioning it to Mr. Herne, he looked very grave, and said it was plain she was unfit for any mental drudgery at present, and required more entire change and repose than she had yet been able to enjoy: he thought I had better take her away for several weeks, not to a friend's house, but where we should be quite by ourselves, and yet have novelty without excitement.

Jacintha was called in to our council, and, on hearing what Mr. Herne said, was eager that his wishes should be adopted, declaring herself quite able to spare us both. I knew we could ill afford it, but what could we do? Miss Linnet's lodgings were cheap; we could live there on as little as anywhere: I asked Mr. Herne whether Fishport would be a suitable place: he said Yes; he knew of none better.

So Marian was summoned from the school-room, where, against advice, she *would* steal in ; and Mr. Herne, after a few professional inquiries, told her as gently as possible, that she neither was almost well nor likely to be so, while she remained at home, and, that for the sake of her affectionate family, it was her duty to go to the sea-side.

Poor Marian flushed, and her eyes filled with tears, which presently overflowed ; but Mr. Herne was a man accustomed to carry his point ; and, before he left us, it was a settled thing that I should write by the next post to Miss Linnet, to inquire if we could have her lodgings.

During the two days that elapsed before I could receive her answer, Marian was much dispirited ; but when the letter came, it made her laugh, and after that, she looked forward to the journey cheerfully. Thus wrote Miss Linnet :—

“ 12, *Sea View, Fishport,*
“ *Thursday Afternoon.*

“ **MADAM,**

“ Your favour of yesterday duly to hand. It gave my sister and self genuine concern to learn that your amiable and attractive sister should be seriously out of health, in consequence of the insidious inroads of that recent scourge of our isle, influenza. Doubtless the marine breezes will restore to her cheeks their pristine bloom ; for youth, my dear madam, soon and effectually repairs the ravages of disease. I dare say you are familiar with

Savage's 'Ode on the Recovery of a Lady of Quality from the Smallpox'—death aimed the blow, but was foiled. I am happy to state that our modest tenement is at present unoccupied, and quite at your service. It is a pleasing reflection, though recently a bitter one, that the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon declined enjoying our apartments this season, for the (scarcely reasonable?) reason that we charged too much for her bedroom fire (6d. *per diem*—considering she had the kitchen fire gratis, not dear, I think?) Surely this ignoble closeness too plainly reveals (what indeed, is the case) that her nobility is that of connection, not of descent. I am, madam, with my sister's best duty,

“Yours respectfully,
“(for sister and self),
“KEZIA LINNET.

“Compliments to Miss Marian pre-supposed.
A line will oblige, stating when to expect you.”

I remember, that when Marian was selecting what to have packed up for this expedition, she put away a very pretty coloured muslin, and took out one that had faded and washed out, saying it would do very well for a place where no one would see us. A very ordinary shawl and a garden-hat were packed on the same principle, though I told her she was paying me a very poor compliment. But she said so much in defence of the usefulness of the old hat and shawl on the shingle, that I could not reply to it.

We took leave of Jacintha with regret, for we were leaving her to work for us all; but she made quite light of it, and said she would cheerfully undertake thrice the toil, if she could but re-establish the reputation of the school; and that as for Marian's share of the business, the best course she could pursue would be that which would soonest make her quite well.

Our little journey was accomplished quite safely; and our arrival at 12, Sea View, was hailed with joy by the Misses Linnet, whose kind eyes shone with tears when they saw how much Marian was wasted by her illness. They made a thousand little excuses to hover about us; and it was evident that no small pains had been bestowed in preparing for us. After Marian had seated herself in an easy-chair at the open window to enjoy the fresh sea-air, Miss Linnet came with an extra cushion, which she said she was sure would make her more comfortable, and then lingered for yet a little more chat, while I made tea.

"Is Fishport full?" said Marian, with a pretty accurate knowledge of its general emptiness.

"There are *some* vacant houses, certainly," said Miss Linnet with a little cough; "No. 4 and No. 5—but it is thought the drains are defective. No. 6 is under repair. Nos. 7, 8, and 9, as you are aware, are occupied by resident families. Mrs. Tweedy, of No. 10, is absent—she has *not* let her house—not that I am aware of her having tried. No. 11 is likewise unoccupied at present, except by servants."

"But you have not accounted for Nos. 1, 2, and 3."

"Oh, surely not. No. 1 is again in the occupation of the Mullion family. Mrs. Mullion is still, sad to say, very delicate in the chest; this fine air will doubtless restore her—in time. At No. 2 are the De Wrights—at least, so I understand the name—at first, I took it simply for Wright, but I am told there is a *de* before it. No. 3, you are aware, is a boarding-house: it does not answer, nor can it ever be expected to answer, or its proprietress, Mrs. Underton, would hardly have received her only two present boarders, I think—for nobody else will be very likely to intrude on her circle, if report speak truly of them."

"And what does report say?" inquired Marian.

"That they are a madman and his keeper," said Miss Linnet, with another little cough.

"Dear me, how unpleasant!" said I. "I hope we shall see nothing of them!"

"How should we?" said Marian. "Surely nine doors' distance is far enough off."

"There they are now!" cried Miss Linnet, excitedly: "just at the point of the cliff. They will have turned the corner in another minute."

Marian and I looked after them, but could only see a couple of long-legged figures, whose length of limb was ludicrously prolonged by the reflection in the wet sand.

"And there's Mrs. De Wright!" cried Miss Linnet, "with her pink parasol. Pretty little woman! *She* need not mind leaving her foot-

print on the sand, for it is the smallest I ever saw—as small as *yours*, Miss Marian. Oh, Miss Marian, what a *sweet* book you gave my sister! I assure you it has been our select reading on Sabbath evenings ever since. There are thoughts in it that—There goes *Mr. De Wright*. That gentleman with whom he is shaking hands is our new curate, the Reverend Eugenius Carp. Mr. De Wright is evidently on the look-out for his wife, but is looking the wrong way. If he does not turn his head in a moment, she will be behind the point. He *has* turned his head! What a near thing!"

The next morning Miss Linnet came in with a little laugh, which, in any other person I should have thought rather affected. "Oh, my dear ma'am, my dear Miss Marian," began she, flirting out her hands, "such a blunder! such a ridiculous mistake! I *thought* I was quite sure, but to make quite secure, I said to the postman this morning, 'The family at No. 2 are the De Wrights!' 'Yes,' says he, 'the Wrights, Mr. and Mrs. Dannel Wright.' 'Dannel!' exclaimed I, 'why, now, *didn't* you tell me there was a *de* before their name?' 'A D.? certainly!' says he: 'D. stands for Dannel, all the world over!' So there, I have been telling you they were the De Wrights! What an old goose you must think me!" Then, with an instantaneous change of her tone into one of deep gravity, "What will it please you, madam, that I shall provide for your dinner?"

In the course of a few days I marked with

joy a decided improvement in Marian. Her delirium gradually ceased, her appetite improved, her strength increased, and her colour returned. Little by little, it is true, but still she made steady progress. Bathing always agreed with her, and it now seemed to reinvigorate her day by day. Round the point, which has already been mentioned, was a semi-circular sweep made by the cliffs, where the bathing-machines occupied the foreground, while a nice bed of dry shingle, under the rocks, afforded me a pleasant resting-place, while Marian took her bath, rather earlier than other people were accustomed to do.

A very odd incident occurred here one day, which I must now relate. I was sitting nearer to the sea than usual, with a considerable space between me and the rocks, so as to leave plenty of room for people to pass unnoticed, though I had not observed a creature astir on the sands. I was crocheting very industriously; and Marian, who had taken her bath, was seated beside me, deep in "Tremaine," with her long hair hanging down to dry, when, on accidentally moving, she suddenly cried out on finding it weighted behind. A large and very fine crab was clinging with apparent pertinacity to the end of her tresses! But the crab had been boiled, and was ingeniously attached to its moorings by a piece of pack-thread!

"What impertinence! What audacity!" cried I, in indignation. "Who can have done it?"

"The madman, I should think," said Marian,

laughing. "Gently, Isabella! you are pulling my hair unmercifully—use your scissors."

I did so, and down fell the crab. I looked right and left for the perpetrator of the outrage, but not a soul could I see.

"Shameful! abominable!" said I. "This place wants a policeman—it is no longer a spot where unprotected females may roam about unmolested."

"Nay, we were not even roaming," said Marian, merrily, "but sitting quite still. What shall we do with the crab? it is a very fine one—shall we carry it home?"

"Certainly not!" said I, with decision. "If it were holiday time, one might expect anything from schoolboys; but among a set of grown people, it is an unpardonable freedom!"

"I never knew you so wrathful, Isabella!" said Marian, who seemed to enjoy the joke in proportion to my discomfiture. "When your turn comes, perhaps it will be a lobster."

"My turn will *never* come, for it *shall* not," said I, rising with difficulty from my lowly seat: "let us go home—there is no comfort for us here, now our privacy has been invaded. We don't know who may be spying at us, or over-hearing us at this moment. Horrible!"

"As to overhearing us," said Marian, surveying the wide area all around, "I don't see how that is possible, unless the eaves-dropper is a fairy; and as for spying at us, some one *may* be *perdu* among the rocks, certainly; but if he is taking anything but a bird's-eye view of us it must be through a telescope."

"And there is hardly a man here who has not one tucked under his arm!" cried I.
"Come along."

"Stay, you are entangling your cotton—and you have dropped your parasol. Where is my book? Dear me, I was in the midst of such a pretty dialogue between Georgiana and her father. Now, then, Isabella, let us throw a sufficient portion of severity into our countenances as we walk along, for the benefit of the unknown offender! What a pity no poor fisherman, or woman, or boy, is near, that we might tell them where to find a nice crab! But not a creature is within sight—or within earshot."

It appeared so; and yet, just as we were passing the nearest of the rickety old bathing-machines, it did seem to me that I heard a hollow voice murmur—

"Jack!—she won't have the crab!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Now 'tis high water ; and, with hundreds more,
He goes to catch the sea-breeze on the shore,
Or pace the crowded terrace, where one sees
Fashion and folly, beauty and disease :
The alderman, wheeled out in gouty chair ;
The lovesick girl, sent down for change of air ;
The sickly child, to bathe his crippled knee ;
The hopeless hectic, come to try the sea.

JANE TAYLOR : *Essays in Rhyme.*

“ **M**Y dear Marian,” said I, as we walked towards our lodgings, “ you really must give up wearing that old hat and shawl—they are quite plebeian ; and anybody viewing you behind, sitting on the shingle and buried under your strange habiliments, might very naturally mistake your position in life, and—and—”

“ Tie a crab on to my back hair ! ” said Marian. “ Well, I don’t think *any* body, at least everybody, would. There is no knowing what a madman might do. But, do you know, I very much doubt the accuracy of Miss Linnet’s report about him.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Why ? Oh, because I’ve seen him once or twice at a distance, and he has not been demeaning himself in that way at all : and because it is not the only matter concerning which she has been misinformed. Think of

the De Wrights. However, if you think that for general, rather than particular reasons, my personal appearance might be and ought to be improved, there is such a pretty little white silk bonnet, Isabella, in Madame Ecru's *dépot Parisienne*—only two pounds two!"

"Marian!"

"Well, would it not be a nice substitute for this old brown hat?"

"Where is the money to come from?"

"Oh, I can soon get that from the editor of the *Farnsbury Miscellany*, by sending him a tale called, 'What do you think of it?' I have it all in my head—it only wants writing down."

"Then it may continue to want it, my dear Marian, for no bonnet shall be bought at the price of another brain fever!"

"But I am much more likely to relieve my brain by clearing it of the story than by keeping it pent up. You don't understand us authoresses—us women of genius!" said she, laughing.

"Perhaps I don't, but I hope I understand enough of what is right and fitting in such a case as this. So you must content yourself with some cheaper substitute for the brown hat, or continue to wear it."

"Well, Isabella, I have had my harmless little joke, and now you shall see how docile I am. At a small straw-bonnet shop close to the market-house, I have seen a very pretty little bonnet, larger than a daisy—which I know would exactly fit me; and I can buy some blue ribbon and make the curtain, and put on the strings myself."

"That sounds more reasonable; but, scarcely larger than a daisy?—my poor child, your head requires shade."

"Which it can't have, except in a hat, unless I have an absolute basket. You know, Isabella, one must be guided a little by the fashion. Remember Mrs. Frances Reynolds' aphorism—'To aim at leading the fashion argues little sense—not to follow it, still less.'"

"Well, my dear girl, it is something quite new to hear you advocating that side of the question."

"Why, was it not you," said Marian, rather quickly, "who called my dress plebeian? I do not wish to look otherwise than a lady."

With a smile, I replied, "You cannot."

As we reached Miss Linnet's gate, she suddenly said, "Don't say anything about the crab!" and blushed extremely.

"Certainly not," said I. "It was a disagreeable occurrence, and had best be kept between ourselves."

"Things get about so," said Marian, "and are so distorted; even by such a harmless person as Miss Linnet. One does not wish to be known along the row as the young lady that had the crab tied on to her hair. I dare say the person who did it little thought of the annoyance it might occasion—or is very sorry for it now."

"Madmen don't let such freaks trouble their consciences," said I.

"Isabella, you *will* have your own way about that! I think you will prove mistaken."

I asked her why: but, just then, we saw Miss Linnet at the door; so my question was unanswered.

The little straw bonnet was bought, and trimmed, and worn; but though Marian's appearance was much improved by it, its deficiency in shade was such that she used to carry an umbrella with her to the beach; and this was so cumbersome that she was glad to avail herself of a parasol almost as large, lent her by Miss Linnet, who told her she need have no scruple in using it, as it had been purposely left behind by the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon.

Jacintha would have scorned using a second-hand parasol; but, luckily, Marian was less fastidious, and had a greater regard for comfort: so under this large parasol she and her little bonnet found ample shelter. We continued to sit on the shingle a good deal, but our feeling of security was gone; at least, when we recollect what had happened, which, of course, was not always. However, I kept a much sharper look-out about us than before, and was conscious of something of a duenna-like feeling.

Marian had not forgotten her *protégé*, the lame lad, and she now supplied him with two or three new designs for his sand-drawings. Tasteless productions they were, at best; and yet they were more saleable, apparently, than many things I should have considered better worth the money. They hit the popular taste; and John Frost was so elated by his success that he talked of raising his price from one

shilling to two, from which we strongly dissuaded him. Poor fellow! he was a pitiable object; and I think many of the sixpences and shillings he obtained must have been given from sheer compassion: but his self-respect was not lowered thereby; and probably few of our best painters felt a more self-sufficing independence.

There was a curious old round chimney and ruinous gable overgrown with ivy, about ten minutes' walk from the back of Miss Linnet's house, which Marian thought she should like to sketch. But it was across a ploughed field; so I only accompanied her to its verge, and promised to await her under the hedge. She arranged the old shawl for my seat, and then left me basking in the sun.

I had been knitting very comfortably some minutes, and was thinking of Mary Barnet and her good father, when I heard a low voice close behind me, say—

“Jack, here he is!”

I looked hastily round, and met the large, bright eyes of some one on the other side of the hedge in a crouching position. He started almost as much as I did, but immediately turned his head, and in an eager but suppressed voice, repeated—

“Jack, here he is, I say! Bring the cage, or he'll bite my fingers.”

I felt very uncomfortable, and began to put up my work. Jack, meanwhile, seemed to come up, for the speaker continued—

“Mrs. Rat-tat is not within, though there are a lot of young ones. Only think, the old

gentleman has fifteen partridge-eggs in his larder!"

"We must give him some water," says Jack, "or he'll die in five minutes. They're unaccountable thirsty."

"Hush!" says the other in a low voice, "there's a lady the other side the hedge."

"The pretty one?" whispers Jack, eagerly.

"No—the other."

What a compliment! Somehow, I began to have an impression that this couple, whom I had immediately decided on as the madman and his keeper, could not be in such an uncomfortable relation to each other—they seemed on better terms.

Just then, the furious bark of a savage dog in the distance, followed by a scream, made me involuntarily cry out and start up, for I was sure Marian was in danger.

"What's the matter, ma'am?" cried Mr. Jack's companion, springing over the hedge, with excitement depicted in his good-looking countenance.

"Nothing—oh yes!—a dog has flown at her, I'm afraid!" cried I, disjointedly, "and I'm lame—Oh, do run!"

"Trust me for it," said he, darting off like lightning.

"Allow me," said Mr. Jack, swinging himself over a gate close by, "to escort you, ma'am, over the furrows," holding his hat above his head.

He was unmistakeably a gentleman, about two or three-and-twenty; not so comely as his companion, but with a pale, lantern-jawed face, which, however, was full of fun and *espiéglerie*.

I was declining his courtesy with a distant bow, when it struck me I was barely polite to the Achates of the hero I had sent to Marian's rescue, and I therefore said—

“Thank you, sir, but I would much rather you should go to the assistance of my sister.”

“Frank is but too happy, ma'am, to be in attendance on her,” replied Mr. Jack, with the utmost courtesy, “and all danger is over, for he has thrown a stone at the dog, and is now escorting the young lady over the clods—I wish there were many such clod-hoppers !”

As it was not clear which of them he meant, I said nothing; and the pair having now reached us within speaking distance, apparently in fluent talk, the young gentleman cried out—

“Jack! only think—I know this lady very well !”

“Goodness! what will she say to the crab?” ejaculated Jack.

“Knows her very well!” repeated I to myself, in dismay. “Pray, sir, who is your friend?” I inquired abruptly.

“Who, ma'am? Mr. Frank Duncan of Pendynas,—Frank by name, and frank by nature; and your humble servant is John Jekyl, at your command.”

“Isabella!” said Marian, approaching me with heightened colour, “this is Mr. Francis Duncan—cousin of *our* Mr. Duncan, you know.”

I remembered very well. “How very singular!” said I, returning his bow and smile. “I had no idea!”

“Nor I, I'm sure,” said he. “Most fortu-

nate occurrence. I shall be fond of barking dogs as long as I live!"

"So very odd!" said Marian.

"Chance meetings often occur at watering-places," said I. "Pray, sir, have you been here long?"

"Only about ten days, ma'am. My friend Mr. Jekyl had been working his brain rather too hard."

("So *he's* the madman!") thought I.

"And, as I had been doing the very same thing, we agreed to come here and rusticate a little, and live as much as possible in the open air. We are civil engineers, Miss Middlemass: Jack is a surprising fellow—he'll cut through the Alps some day; in fact, he is meditating some such project e'en now—and the seeing his way right through it, like an avenue, had such an effect on his brain, poor dear fellow, that he was ready to faint away on the spot. So, before he did himself any more harm, I got him down here, with consent of friends, and undertook to be his keeper."

"So that explains—" said I, hastily.

"Explains what?" said Mr. Duncan.

As I did not reply, he went on—"Undertook to keep him as much from study, and as much amused, as could be. So, just now, we were catching a rat. We are both great naturalists, and I believe our landlady is sufficiently annoyed at the spoils we carry home. You know sea-blubbers? The other day we carried her one, of enormous circumference, and told her to dress it for dinner. You should have seen her look!"

"She must have thought you mad," said I, hastily.

"She *does*, ma'am—she thinks so of Jack; and we play a little upon her fears. When he gave her his orders about the sea-blubber, she gave me such a terrified look, and I just nodded and made a face; so then she told him she would have obliged him with pleasure, but that she was afraid she had not a fish-kettle large enough."

"Dear me, but you should not foster such reports!" said I.

"Why not?" said Mr. Duncan. "I have not told one single untruth about it—only if old ladies *will* be silly, you know—Are you curious in polypi, Miss Middlemass? or sea-anemones?"

"No," said I, "but my sister is."

"Do allow me to procure her some, then!" cried he: and, by some sudden changing of positions, I found Mr. Jekyl walking at my side, and Mr. Duncan beside Marian. We were now very slowly pacing our way to the beach; and Mr. Jekyl had possessed himself of my old shawl, which, in spite of me, he would carry.

"No, no," said he, holding it at arm's length, "I have an ulterior purpose for this shawl; and you owe me some reparation, Miss Middlemass—for you have been the means of my losing a most valuable rat. So you really are acquainted with my friends, the Duncans?"

"Not with *your* friend's branch," said I, distinctly: "only with his cousins."

"Only?—and why only? Mr. James Dun-

can I have always understood to be a most upright, excellent man."

"Indeed he is," I replied, "and his sweet little wife is quite worthy of him. We have their two little girls under our care."

He looked rather at fault, but I had discharged my conscience, as the equivocal saying is, and I did not think it needful, just then, to be more explicit.

"Here," said he, as we came to a small, isolated rock projecting from the sand, which people often used for a seat, "here is the spot where I hope to make your shawl useful, if it is not too costly and precious."

I hoped he would confine his irony, veiled though it was, to the old shawl, which he proceeded to spread officially on the rock for our accommodation.

"Thank you," said I, "but I think we must now go in, for we are both rather tired."

"Then you both need rest, surely," expostulated Mr. Jekyl, "and your sister looks delicate."

This was touching a tender chord, so I relented and sat down, but sat on thorns. Meanwhile, my younger companions, in no wise troubled by my old-maidish perplexities, were discoursing gaily on the beauty of the tide, now coming in, and watching for the ninth wave.

"What's that?" cried Mr. Jekyl, as something was thrown ashore.

"Something quaint and strange, rely upon it," cried his volatile companion, starting up and running towards it.

"Don't let us disturb ourselves," said Mr.

Jekyl, coolly, when he was gone ; " it is nothing but an old hat."

Mr. Duncan, however, was crying out— " Jack ! Jack ! here's the biggest *Rhizostoma Cuvieri* you ever saw in your life. Do come ! "

" A what ? " said I.

" A *Medusa*—a sea-blubber, " explained Mr. Jekyl ; " I've had enough of them—I shan't go—I like sitting here better. Let's pretend not to hear him."

" Do come ! " reiterated his friend.

" No, no ; I don't want to see the nasty creature dissolving in the sun."

" Do come, Miss Middlemass ! Miss Marian Middlemass ! "

I did not stir, but Marian took compassion on him, and went to look at it, in spite of my saying, " No, Marian—better not—" which, I believe, she did not hear.

" She will only tire herself, " said I, in rather a dissatisfied tone.

" You do not patronize marine researches, Miss Middlemass ? "

" Pray, Mr. Jekyl, have you ever studied the natural history of the crab ? "

He gave me a sharp, quick look, and burst into a fit of laughter, which, however, evidently was the cover of embarrassment.

" Murder will out, " said he ; " I knew—I knew it would ! Miss Middlemass, if it will be the least satisfaction to you to receive my apology on my bended knees—"

" You *were*, then, the party ? " cried I.

" *One* of us was, " said he. " Which of us,

we have mutually resolved never to divulge.
But—”

“ But how could you ever presume to take such a liberty with *any* stranger—*any* lady ! ”

“ My dear, dear madam, *pray* do not look and speak so very severely, or I shall dissolve before you like that horrible sea-blubber. It *was* a great—a gross liberty; but a little explanation and reflection will make it appear somewhat less heinous. We were in schoolboy spirits just then, and *one* of us (I say not which), seeing you seated on the shingle, with a little girl (we positively thought it was a little girl) beside you, learning her lessons, one of us said to the other, ‘ I’ll bet you a dozen cigars I’ll tie a crab on to that young lady’s back hair without her finding it out ; ’ and the other said, ‘ You won’t,’ and the first said, ‘ I will ; ’ and so we kept on till at last what had been said in fun and folly became a point of honour between us, and the crab was bought in soberness and solemnity—quite in the ‘ Excelsior ’ vein ; and the knight-errant went forth with trusty squire on his emprise, and bided his time, and lay in wait, and dogged his prey, and did the deed, and—”

“ Watched its effect from the window of a bathing-machine ! ” said I, unable to help laughing. “ Oh the noble deed ! ”

“ Precisely so : we had become intensely interested in the result—especially on discovering that our victim was no little girl, but a grown-up and beautiful young lady. Still, we did not see her near enough for Frank to recognise her ; but our souls were already beginning to be har-

rowed by the most poignant—Oh, Miss Middlemass ! they are close upon us—say, say you forgive us !”

“I am not quite sure that I do,” replied I, gravely ; “your repentance appears to me but skin-deep, and I very much fear does not vouch for a change of character and conduct.”

“Worse and worse ! What *can* you expect in so short a time ? And, if you drive us to despair by dooming us to contempt and neglect, —Well, Frank, have you buried the blubber ?”

CHAPTER XXII.

But anxious cares the pensive nymph oppressed,
And secret troubles laboured in her breast.

POPE.

THESE vivacious young gentlemen attended us to our own door, and their last word was a merry one, accompanied by bows of profound respect. When I entered my own room, I sat down quite breathless and perplexed. Who could tell what a tissue of circumstances might ensue from this accidental acquaintance? Here was a fine-looking young man, well-born and well connected, who had dropped, as it were, from the clouds, and who had just enough previous introduction to Marian to make him admissible, if he chose it, on terms of easy acquaintance: and here was Marian, with her animated looks and cheerful manners, evidently very glad to see him! Well, and what then? Was I to nip the incipient intimacy in the bud, just because it *might* lead to dangerous consequences? Why, yes; I was afraid I ought: because, though her spirits were certainly likely to be improved for the time by so lively an acquaintance, yet if he made a deeper impression on her than she did on him, I might have reason to be sorry for it, and to blame myself for it all the rest of my life!

If! if! What absurdity to be thus pre-

cipitately running ahead of events ! there was even something indelicate in it : I should be quite ashamed for Marian to know my thoughts. And so I rose, and arranged my dress for dinner, and took up a book, and lay down on the sofa to enjoy it.

Instead of that, I kept thinking of the bright eyes through the hedge, and the leap over it—and the rats, and the *Medusa*, and the crab—was ever such a jumble ? Who was the culprit in that affair ? *Not* Mr. Jekyl, I was afraid, though he wanted me to suspect him ; but of this I could not be by any means certain. Then, was it worth while to take a serious view of such a boyish frolic ? But did not it argue a lightness of character, and want of proper respect for women ? Well, I tried to judge harder of him than I did. But yet, on the whole, I thought it safest to keep our new acquaintance at a distance.

Therefore, when Marian said—

“ I suppose we shall see a good deal of them now,” I said, “ Dear me, no ; why should we ? ” On which she held her peace. I broke silence next by saying, “ Were you not very much surprised when Mr. Duncan ran up to you ? ”

“ Yes, very,” she replied, “ but I was not so very much surprised that the reputed madman should prove to be him, as you might think ; because, once or twice, seeing him at a distance, his figure and air struck me as like those of some one I had seen before, and at length I remembered Mr. Francis Duncan.”

“ You never said so.”

"Because I was not sure. It was only a passing thought."

"Do you suspect him or Mr. Jekyl of having tied the crab to your hair?"

"Did they say anything to you about it?" said Marian, quickly.

"Oh, yes; Mr. Jekyl said a great deal."

"Do tell me what he said."

"He said he was very sorry, and that they had taken you for a little girl, and one had laid the other a wager he would do it."

"Which one?"

"That he would not tell."

"Mr. Jekyl, no doubt," said Marian.

"Well, I rather suspect his friend. But I fear there is not much to choose between them."

"Why do you fear, if both are agreeable and entertaining?"

"I am afraid they may not be very steady."

"Ah, Isabella, why are you so hard on harmless mirth?"

"The question is, is it harmless?"

"Yes," said Marian, boldly. "People need not be the less wise nor the less good for enjoying a joke as heartily as a schoolboy. I was the only sufferer, and if I can forgive and forget it (which I do), I think other people may."

I was silenced. The afternoon proved wet, and Marian amused herself by writing a long letter to Jacintha, while I pored over "Tremaine." Just as I was in the middle of a tough theological discussion, her pen ceased scratch scratching, and her full-filled sheet was put between me and my book, while she said, with a little laugh—

“ You may read it, if you like.”

It was a most diverting letter. Jacintha told me afterwards how she laughed over it; and we read it together again, long after, under very different circumstances. I enjoyed it thoroughly, though there were some harmless witticisms at my expense; and returned it to her with thanks, saying, I was sure it would give Jacintha a great deal of pleasure. Marian was so content with her performance, that she folded and directed it in great glee; and then saying, “ Now for my novel !” seized the other volume of “ Tremaine,” and we were both as mute as mice the rest of the evening, and perfectly happy. People may say what they will, but the writer of good and healthy novels is not useless to his kind.

The next morning, on entering the parlour, I almost stumbled over a small hamper, directed to Miss Middlemass. “ What can this be? and from whom ?” said I to Marian, who followed me. Impatiently cutting the packthread, with vague visions of hothouse fruit and dead game, I no sooner raised the lid a little than I dropped it in affright, exclaiming—

“ It’s alive ! ”

“ What is alive ? ” cried Marian.

“ All sorts of things inside ! ” said I, timidly peeping in again.

“ Crabs ? ” said Marian, inspecting its contents more boldly. There was, indeed, a noble crab, not boiled, this time, but spreading its feelers all about, and also some sea-anemones, and wriggling shrimps and prawns, great

sprawling star-fishes, acorn-barnacles, and mermaids'-gloves, mingling in most admired disorder, with choice specimens, no doubt, of sack-sponge, crumb-sponge, and sea-weeds, too numerous to mention.

"What a hideous collection!" said I in disgust. "Who could think of sending it to me?"

"To *me!*" said Marian, smiling, as she pointed to the letter M. prefixed to Middlemass. "The direction is on one of Mr. Jekyl's cards, with 'compliments from the gentlemen at No. 3.'"

"Absurd creatures!" said I. "There is not one thing in the basket worth having, except the crab."

"And the shrimps," said Marian, "and the prawns: and the sea-weeds are very pretty, and the sponges curious. See, they have nicely ticketed them all for me, with the Latin and English names. These anemones are beautiful! I must put them in water, pretty creatures, and then they will throw out their feelers."

"Well, the crab and the shrimps can be carried down at any rate," said I, ringing the bell, "or we shall have them crawling or jumping all over the room. And I don't see how either of the young gentlemen was called on to make us a present of any kind—it was very forward of them, I think."

After breakfast we took our books and work to the shingle. No one was there; but before we had long established ourselves there, I saw, without raising my head, two long skeleton shadows noiselessly advancing over the hard

sands. Marian, I presume, saw them too, for she gave my elbow a little touch and whispered, mischievously—

“Here they come—let us pretend not to see them!”

So I pored over my work, and she over her book; and the two long shadows stalked slowly past, and methought I heard a whisper of—

“Jack! they’ve cut us!”

After they were fairly gone, Marian and I triumphed over our *ruse*, though I am not quite sure whether, on second thoughts, she had found the game worth the candle. After musing awhile, she reverted to her book, and read to me a passage which had struck her. She thought Evelyn might have given Tremaïne’s objection a better answer; and we discussed the question seriously for some time, and agreed that he might.

Having sat rather longer than usual, we rose to take our usual turn on the sands; and I was glancing round in a casual way to see whether our young beaux were again in sight, when, lo! they were close to us! Immediately, both hats off, with polite inquiries after our health. To which I, as politely though more distantly, rejoined, while Marian, with less formality and more cordiality, thanked each and both for the basket of curiosities.

“Merely the result of our morning’s sport,” said Mr. Duncan, disclaimingly: “Jack and I get a good swim early, and pick up a few curiosities by the way. I flatter myself, though, you found a tolerable fine specimen of the *Balanus porcatus* in the basket?”

"Really, I don't know," said Marian, amused.

"Or acorn-barnacle. Surely I ticketed it? It has a large, furrowed shell. Oh, why don't men now live as long as Methusaleh? The study of the *Balani* alone would suffice an ordinary lifetime."

"If the interest did not flag," suggested Marian. "Mine would, I think."

"Oh, you have not tried. Just put those *Balani* I sent you into a large earthen pan of sea-water, and watch the changes through which they pass—you will find them most astonishing! Their transformations have been only recently ascertained."

"I am afraid they are dead," said Marian.

"Dead!" cried he, aghast, as if she had been speaking of some nice little child. "Oh, you don't know what you've lost! Why, I've a bucketful, that afford me intense interest. I am afraid, Miss Marian, you do not find pleasure in studying the wonders of creation."

Marian looked rather ashamed at so serious a charge, and began to assure him they interested her very much, only she knew so little about them—she wished she knew more. Down they sat on our favourite rock, and were soon deep in *Balani* and *Actinia*; while I, very glad to rest, was telling Mr. Jekyl how impossible I found it to realize their being civil engineers.

"Why?" asked he, briskly. "Because we were so uncivil about the crab?"

"No," said I, "but I thought civil engineering required steady brains, and thoughtful application."

“Our brains are steady enough on ordinary occasions, ma’am, I can tell you; and it is only because we have applied them to thought rather too much, that we are refreshing ourselves just now with a little relaxation. All work and no play makes Jack Jekyl a dull boy. And there’s no fear of all play and no work making Frank a mere toy. Oh, no! we shall be hard at it again shortly: and then you’ll be pleased. If you see in the *Times*’ columns the following announcement—‘Died, on the 16th ultimo, at the Steephill Viaduct, John Jekyl, Esq., aged twenty-two, of intense mental application, to the inexpressible grief of numerous friends and relatives; and, on the 4th proximo, of excessive grief for the same, and an overwrought mind, Francis Duncan, Esq., aged twenty-three, the pride of his country, and the flower of his family’—then you’ll be delighted!”

“No, I shall not,” said I, laughing.

“Yes, ma’am, you will. I can see it in your eye. My own belief is, you are a lady of such superior endowments, that my only chance of making myself tolerably agreeable to you will be by opening up some subject which you don’t quite understand. Well, then, suppose we discuss the broad and narrow gauge. Or the ‘Geordy’ safety-lamp. Or, suppose, the construction of the multitubular boiler?”

“Oh, spare me, spare me!” said I.

“You laugh as if there were no such thing. Come, let us take a common-sense view of some open question. The fitting of copper tubes, so as to prevent leakage, for instance.

That strikes me as a simple and pleasing subject—especially to ladies. Formerly, you are aware, they were manufactured by a Newcastle coppersmith, and soldered to brass screws, which were screwed into the boiler ends, standing out in great, ugly knobs. Well—with tubes thus nastily fitted, and hydraulic pressure applied (the boiler, of course, being filled), you may readily believe, Miss Middlemass, that the water would squirt out at every joint, and flood the floor of the factory. To avoid this disagreeable consequence—My dear ma'am, are you going? Now, don't! I have not told you the expedient that was found: one of the neatest things in science! Now, don't go! Wind cold? I'll run for an umbrella. Rain coming on? Nothing of the sort. Tide coming in? It won't be over our shoes these ten minutes—unless, indeed, an uncommonly large wave—Well, here comes one, and I believe we must run for it!"

With two such inexhaustible subjects as civil engineering and natural history, it may well be supposed that these fluent young gentlemen found enough to say between the beach and Miss Linnet's. Mr. Duncan was deep in the gambols of the Cyclop or water-flea, while Mr. Jekyl was equally diffuse on smoke-boxes and blast-pipes. Arriving at our door, they both looked inquisitively and anxiously at me, in hopes I should ask them to enter—but I didn't. Mr. Duncan said he was very much wishing to know if the acorn-barnacles were really dead; but I pretended not to hear. Mr. Jekyl said, "To-morrow is Sunday, Miss Middle-

mass, and you may suppose a couple of young fellows would not encumber themselves with much heavy reading. You could not lend me a good book, could you?"

There is nothing I hate like hypocrisy! I darted a look that was enough to pierce him through and through, saying, "If I do, will you read it?"

"Certainly I will," returned he, as with unaffected surprise at my query. "Why, else, should I ask for one? Only don't let it be too dry, that's all. Don't ask me in! I'll wait upon the mat."

But I did ask him in, though grudgingly; for it would have been a sin to miss even the ninety-ninth chance in a hundred of putting one steady thought into such a volatile head; and, as I merely said, "Oh, come in," Mr. Duncan did not follow, but remained talking to Marian on the door-step, and presently was inspecting the defunct barnacle in the passage.

"I really do believe," said Mr. Jekyl, in a low voice, as he followed me to our little row of books, treading as gingerly as if on eggs—"I really do believe that you have adopted the opinion of my being a very bad fellow—and I feel injured accordingly. I do assure you, I have been brought up in a Christian home, and had something above the average Christian training—and so has Frank. What have we here? 'Tremaine!' is *that* a Sunday book, Miss Middlemass?"

"No," said I, with decision.

"'Young's Night Thoughts.' *Can* you expect me to take that? 'Butler's Analogy'—

that's capital, but takes a deal of thinking. 'Sermons on Subjects selected from Scripture Biography'—Bible-and-water. The Bible itself is far more interesting than books of this sort. Borrow's 'Bible in Spain'—oh, *do* lend me that! No?—oh, you must!—I'll read it to-day! I'll read it this present Saturday! *Do* lend me that! Thank you, thank you! I'll take another for to-morrow. 'Life of Robert Hall.' That's good, is not it? Very well, that will do—Thank you! thank you!"

And away they went. Somehow or other, they had supplied us with plenty to talk about, during the rest of the morning. Some of the marine reptilia were found in fine condition, and Marian was dabbling her pretty fingers in their salt-water bath frequently during the day.

The afternoon's post brought me an unexpected letter from Mrs. Duncan. Directly I saw it was from her, I was convinced Mr. Francis Duncan had written to her. After kind inquiries about our health, and brief allusion to her own, she proceeded to say—

"I dare say you have found out by this time that Frank is lodging close to you. Do take a little compassion on the poor fellow—he has always been quite a home-boy, very dependent on female society, and, I must say for him, is a pretty general favourite with the ladies. He deserves to be so, certainly; for a sweeter temper and better heart cannot easily be found. He is very steady too, and has more beneath the surface than you would think. He and his friend Mr. Jekyl have been pursuing their pro-

fession much too ardently, and the consequence in Mr. Jekyl's case, was nearly a brain fever. Give my love to them both, and pray take compassion on them, and let them see as much of you as they can."

"Are you satisfied now, Isabella?" said Marian, with a mischievous smile, as she returned me the letter.

"Certainly," said I, "though I believe they would not care much for seeing as much of *me* as they can, if you were not included in the bargain."

Marian laughed and said, "They must take us as they find us."

"Which they seem quite ready to do," said I.

That night, just as we were thinking of going to bed, a violent ring at the house-bell was succeeded by Mr. Duncan's voice in the hall.

"Tell Miss Middlemass, with Mr. Duncan's compliments, that there is a most splendid phosphorescent illumination of the sea."

While the girl was hammering at these long words, I went out, and in my blandest manner said, "Come in—pray come in!"

"Oh, you are too good," said he, immediately entering, followed closely by his friend; "I am afraid we shall incommod you—but the sea really looks so beautiful that it is a pity you should lose the sight. I suppose you are afraid of going down to the beach, even with our escort?"

"Quite," said I, shunning Marian's persuasive look, and drawing up the blind. "We can observe it perfectly well here, you see."

“Better with the window open, though,” said Mr. Jekyl, throwing up the sash. The candles were immediately blown out.

“Jack, shut the window,” said Mr. Duncan, imperatively: “Miss Middlemass is afraid of the cold.”

“No, not for a few minutes,” said I, drawing my shawl round me. “How beautiful it is!”

“How beautiful is night!” said Mr. Duncan; and went through the whole passage very feelingly.

“See,” cried he, “how every stroke of that boatman’s oars illumines the dark water under his boat’s quarter. Jack, we must have a pailful of these *noctiluca*; and, by the by, Miss Middlemass, if you have a bucketful in your bedroom, it will serve you as a night-light.”

After a little more desultory chat, they took leave; Mr. Duncan saying, “You’ll be glad to get rid of the dog and his shadow!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Sundays of man's life,
Threaded together on Time's string,
 Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal, glorious king.
 On Sunday, heaven's gate stands ope,
Blessings are plentiful and ripe,
 More plentiful than hope.

GEORGE HERBERT.

IT was a beautiful Sabbath morning ; warm, but fresh ; and the tide coming in, sparkled in the sun. Happily for us, the little old Saxon church was so near as to be quite accessible to us ; and thither Marian and I repaired, full of thankfulness that we were able to "go up to the house of the Lord in company."

Though there was such a moderate sprinkling of visitors at Fishport, yet when they were all packed together with the regular inhabitants into this little church, it was full to overflowing. Marian's pretty muslin dress had somehow found its way down to her, and her new bonnet became her well, so that never had I seen her look prettier ; but she was one of those who, having once dressed themselves to their mind, take no more thought about the matter, and I am convinced that she was not in the least occupied with her looks, to the distraction of her thoughts from better subjects. On the contrary, she was almost too

keenly alive to the impressions of the service, and I observed her more than once sensibly affected by it, and wiping away a quiet tear. Except for that, her demeanour was characterised by a chastened seriousness.

Countrymen in carters' frocks sat on one side of the church, and country-women and lasses in their gay Sunday clothes on the other—but these were in free seats: the upper and middling classes were rather crowded into pews, and every “coign of vantage,” even to the pulpit stairs, had its occupants. We went early, yet the church was quite full; bonnets, blue, pink, white, primrose, made the *tout ensemble* as gay as a flower-bed, yet the silence was such that I could hear the little birds singing in the churchyard. There were swallows, too, that had built inside the church, and kept flying over our heads.

Just as the hand-organ was performing its only voluntary before the service, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Jekyl were put into the pew before us. I conclude they were conscious of our proximity, but they certainly did not betray it; and never did I know two young men conduct themselves more reverently and becomingly in the house of prayer. I was glad to hear them not only join in the singing but in the responses, and to see them use their little Bibles when the lessons were read.

Mr. Carp, the curate, was a forcible and interesting preacher, capable of arresting the attention. I think I remember almost verbatim one thing he said—“When we come, not merely to *read* the Scriptures, but to *know*

them, a thousand little twinkling lights break in upon us, reflecting glory on one another, till, at length, they disclose themselves like suns, each the centre of its own luminous system."

Of course, our young friends found their way to us when we left the church, but they were so quiet and serious that there was nothing but pure pleasure in our intercourse with them. They had evidently attended closely to the sermon from the remarks they made on it, which were in a good spirit.

Just as we reached our gate, I thought—“We are not in the habit of receiving Sunday visitors, but, if these young men spend a quiet hour or two with us in the evening, may it not be a good and pleasant thing for them?” My answer to myself was, Yes; and therefore, just as we were entering the house, I said, “Perhaps, after evening service, you will give us the pleasure of your company to tea.”

I never saw more irrepressible satisfaction light up human faces! Even Marian could not conceal her smiles. “Certainly, certainly, with the greatest pleasure!” cried Mr. Duncan. “You include us *both*, I believe?” (I had addressed *him*.)

“Am I not a man and a brother?” said Mr. Jekyl to him, indignantly. “Miss Middlemass spoke in the plural.”

“Undoubtedly I did,” said I, smiling. And they bowed low, and wished us good morning.

What a pleasant Sunday that was! We discussed our cold lamb and gooseberry tart

quite cheerfully, only wishing Jacintha were with us, and afterwards we both lay down and quietly read our Bibles till church-time. There was not so full a congregation as in the morning, and as we were rather early, we found Mr. Carp catechizing some of the school-children, which I thought he did extremely well.

This time the pew-opener showed our two friends into the pew in which we were already placed; and I observed Marian and Mr. Duncan sharing the same hymn-book, though she did not sing.

Why it should so have been, I know not, but certainly the Misses Linnet took a lively interest in the unexampled event of our having visitors to tea. Accordingly, quite without a hint on my part, the dry toast and buttered roll were flanked with a glass saucer of preserved apricots, and a plate of rich plum-cake, that must, I am sure, have been among Miss Linnet's most treasured hoards. Cream, too, supplied the place of milk, and we had the best china.

I cannot say any of these kind attentions were thrown away, either on us or our guests. The meal was a very social one; we talked over the sermons, discussed the merits of our favourite preachers in town and country, and our favourite books on divinity, by authors alive and dead. I found our companions had a good deal to say on these subjects. Then we talked about George Borrow; and Mr. Jekyl wanted to know whether he meant his narratives to be considered entirely true, and

considered the amount of good a missionary-errant might do as pioneer, and thought he should like such a career himself, if he were not privileged to be a civil engineer.

Then we talked of home-influences, and school-influences, and influences of travel, and influences of different professions ; and the advantages of seclusion and of society, of education, and of self-teaching ; of help, just at the right moment, and of being thrown on our own resources.

Then we considered the allowances that ought to be made for people who had very few advantages ; how doubly, trebly hard it must be to them to be under moral and religious restraints ; how often they must be puzzled and embarrassed what course to pursue ; how difficult they must find it to resist temptation.

We spoke of the lot of the poor ; the difficulty of doing them good in their own way, and of getting to their hearts ; the barrier placed by circumstances between them and the rich ; the different points of view in which they must see things.

We spoke of sympathy—of the inestimable value of it, and how it trebled one's working powers ; of the sympathy of sisters and mothers ; of the blessing of having a chosen friend.

All this was diversified, very naturally, with anecdotes, and scraps of personal experience ; so that the dialogue never became heavy, though it was often very interesting.

Meantime, I was conscious that supper-time and prayer-time were approaching ; and yet these young gentlemen seemed not to have a

thought of moving off. In a fit of desperation, I at length said, with an air of pleasantry—

“Those who stay to supper, stay to prayers. Neither, or both, gentlemen?”

“Both!” cried they simultaneously, and I rang the bell.

I knew there was little I could order to be brought in, except the cold meat, for Marian and I supped on biscuits; but, directly the door was opened, I heard something frying in the kitchen, and a delicate aroma of bacon penetrated into the room.

That excellent creature, Miss Linnet, of her own accord, had garnished the cold lamb, set out the tart, and prepared an incomparable dish of poached eggs and fried bacon, to which our guests, who, like ourselves, had dined early, did ample justice.

Our little prayer-service seemed to cement all hearts, and to be a becoming close to a happy and well-spent day. We shook hands cordially on parting; and our guests declared they had never spent a more delightful evening.

I could not help thanking Miss Linnet afterwards, for her improved arrangements. She waved her hand, and said with the air of a duchess—

“Don’t mention it, my dear ma’am. I have been young myself, and could enter into Miss Marian’s—into your feelings on the occasion. Moreover, had it put me to some little expense (which it did not), I would gladly have incurred it, within my limited means, as an atonement for the awkward mistake I made in supposing

so gentlemanlike a young man as Mr. Duncan could be a—fie! fie! we won't mention it!"

She was flourishing out of the room, when she turned back to say—"As for the apricot-preserve, it was left behind by the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon; and the wedding-cake was a noble slice graciously sent me by the sole child and heiress of Mr. Twiddy, our most eminent confectioner (indeed we have but one), on the occasion of her marriage with Mr. Claudius Fish of Cheapside. Ah, that *was* a wedding indeed! I will dilate on it on some future occasion—I only know of *one* pair of young persons who, should they ever come together (and who knows what futurity may have in store!)—but no, no! I won't presume on the subject!" And she hastened out.

"Miss Linnet deals in riddles to-night," said Marian, looking rather red.

The next morning brought us a cheerful letter from Jacintha, who was anticipating the holidays, now close at hand, with great glee. She hoped to join us in a few days. John and Laura had very kindly pressed her to visit them, but she had declined; she thought she should be happier with us—she did not want gaiety.

The affectionate tone of this letter pleased us much—a line of genuine affection is worth a dozen of common-place news! A dozen? I might have said a thousand. We walked down to our favourite seat, and looked around us with delight, thinking how Jacintha would enjoy the beautiful sea and fresh sea-breezes.

Of course our usual companions soon strolled

up to us. But they were in very low spirits—their holiday was up, and they were going away the very next day. Under these circumstances, I resolved to invite them to drink tea with us, but not immediately. So we fell into rather a serious-toned talk, till presently Mr. Jekyl remarked—

“The Reverend Eugenius Carp has been here before us, I see. Observe, Miss Middlemass, the impression of his tread all along the sand.”

“Why his, rather than any other’s?” inquired I, with surprise.

“Do you seriously ask? Because he has had his left boot new-heeled, which has left rather a different print from the other. I noticed it was so, in accidentally following him on Saturday. Nay, Miss Annington has been closely following him, apparently; don’t you see the impression of her French clogs?”

“Really, you observe rather too closely!” said I, somewhat scandalized.

“How can that be? I have been taught, ma’am, that a scientific man *cannot* observe too closely. From the cradle, my prime object has been ‘how to observe.’ Ridiculous and sometimes dangerous mistakes are made by so-called philosophers, for no other reason than that they begin at the wrong end—reflect first and observe second (if at all); whereas they should observe first—ay, once and again! and again to that!—and reflect afterwards. Consequence is, they shape their observations to their reflections, instead of their reflections to their observations, and no wonder they make a mess of it—



"However," resumed he, "though my observation enables me to discern that Miss Annington has closely followed in Mr. Carp's track, I had not the least intention of insinuating that she did so in company with him, or that he was even in sight. Nay, she may have preceded him, and he followed after, like little Jack Lag. I do not even know them to be on speaking terms, though I conclude she admires his preaching, as I observed her taking notes of his sermon yesterday, on ivory tablets."

"Reflection would have been better there than observation," said I.

"It would," said Mr. Jekyl: "only I really can't *help* observing, unless I shut my eyes: and when people shut their eyes they are apt to fall asleep—or to be thought asleep by censorious observers with their eyes open, which is nearly as bad."

"Not quite," said I.

"It only shifts the sin into another quarter," said Mr. Jekyl. "However, that is something."

We tarried longer than usual, that morning, on the beach; sitting down to rest and renew our pleasant chat several times. The weather was so lovely! the tide came in so grandly! We were driven by it from our seat at last; and, when we reached home, were surprised to find it was just the time of our early dinner. As for the boarding-house luncheon bell, it had been loudly ringing for its two truants in vain.

Amused as we had been, we were both a good deal tired, and glad to rest ourselves on the two little couches after dinner. I believe

I was beginning to doze, when a loud double-knock drove off my impending slumbers, and I rose from my reclining position without dreaming that any one but Mr. Duncan or his friend could be likely to enter.

Instead of either, Miss Linnet, all in a flutter, announced, "Mrs. De Wright!—that is, Mrs. Wright!" and, much to my surprise, in sailed that little lady, very much dressed, and scented, and looking extremely consequential, but very good-humoured and affable.

Mrs. De Wright (I beg her pardon—Mrs. Wright) was one of those who use a dozen words when one would suffice; and after a rather meandering preamble about intrusion, no introduction, &c., she went on to say that she had heard our school so very well spoken of by her friend Mrs. Meade, that, finding from her we were so close at hand, she had called to make personal inquiries whether we could, and would, undertake the charge of her two little girls at the end of the holidays.

Of course, I was highly gratified; and we were entering into very fluent discourse on the subject, when, lo! *another* loud knock prepared us for the entrance of our two young friends, whom we (or at least I) had previously expected.

I was very much amused at their startled and disappointed looks on finding the field pre-occupied; and equally so at Mrs. Wright's quick, bright glance at them from head to foot, and the expression which her countenance seemed to me to reveal of her determination, "Here I shall remain till I see who and what they are!"

After a few general remarks, they both seemed to consider Mrs. Wright my peculiar property, and devoted themselves both to the amusement of Marian; but I detected, or thought I detected, in every tone, an avowal that they thought Mrs. Wright in the way, and wished her out of it. Mrs. Wright, however, seemed in no hurry to gratify them: once or twice, the conversation became general, and very entertaining—I could see that she was amused and pleased, and I liked her the better for it. Then we again divided into two parties, and I told her in a low voice, of the long season of sickness and trial we had had, and how ill Marian had been, and how her desire for usefulness had thrown her back; and how Jacintha was now generously undertaking the whole burthen of the school, in order that we might return to it, invigorated and refreshed, after the holidays.

To all this Mrs. Wright listened with interest and sympathy, though she seemed to have heard a good deal about it from Mrs. Meade. Then her eyes seemed irresistibly drawn to the others: she looked earnestly at Marian, and then said aside to me, "How very pretty your sister is!—I think her quite lovely!"

I smiled, and made a little bow.

"There is something uncommon in her style," she presently added softly; "so simple, and noble: a mixture of intellect and sweetness. One of those who become everything they wear."

I could only smile and look pleased.

"I should think," she pursued, "she has very winning ways with children."

“Very,” said I: and then I spoke of the devoted attachment entertained for her by Fanny Ward, and of the manner in which it had influenced and ripened Fanny’s character.

“Ah, I can quite believe it,” said Mrs. Wright. “Children are sensible to the charm of manner, and to the attraction of good looks, as well as to kindness and sympathy. For my part, I always prefer having pretty nurses for them, though some people are so afraid of pretty servants. But I never find they have better principles for having ugly faces: and a married lady must have a very poor opinion of herself (drawing herself up a little), if she can be jealous or envious of her maid.”

At this crisis, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Jekyl, beginning to consider the case hopeless, rose in despair to take leave; and, as they did so, I said with a smile—

“As we are to lose you so soon, perhaps you will drink tea with us this evening?”

“Oh, certainly, certainly,” said they, with undisguised glee.

“I suppose I must say eight o’clock?”

“Oh no! seven, if you please! That is, if it suits you, it will suit us.”

“It will suit me better than eight. Then, so let it be.”

When they were gone, Mrs. Wright possessed herself of their names, observed they were fine young men, and seemed to have a fine flow of animal spirits; then, after a few general remarks, took leave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

In various talk th' instructive hours they passed.
POPE.

WHEN our visitors joined us at tea-time, Mr. Jekyl asked me if I remembered the words of an old glee—

“O, why to be happy a moment forbear,
From a dread that to-morrow will darken with care?”

I replied, that it sounded rather Anacreontic.

“Ah, but Frank and I feel anything but Anacreontic,” replied he, “when we think that to-morrow we shall be off to the west. Oh dear, we must beware of letting it poison the enjoyment of this evening!”

“Why should it not rather enhance it?” said I.

“Ay, why? why? By the by, what a grudge I owed that lady in the pink bonnet this afternoon for monopolizing you as she did! There was Frank like a wall of ice between me and Miss Marian, and I was obliged to sit mute as a shrimp!”

“I think you do yourself injustice,” said I: “I heard you utter several sprightly remarks.”

“Sprightly! Oh, what a horrid word!”

“Some ingenious ones, too.”

“Ingenious is a quaint, old-fashioned word,

to which I do not altogether object in its primary signification. My remarks were characterized by genius! I hope I shall prove a man of genius some day. Frank and I concerted something between us this morning, as we paced the sands, that may or may not prove valuable."

"What was it?"

"Something relating to tunnelling through quicksands."

"Surely that is impossible?" said I.

"Impossible is not in the civil engineer's vocabulary," said Mr. Jekyl, gravely; and he then explained to me what I understood, or thought I understood, to be the solution of a very formidable difficulty.

All this time I am giving a very undue prominence to Mr. Jekyl's conversation and mine, simply because, from his addressing himself so continually to me, I could not hear one word Mr. Duncan said to Marian; but, from the expression of her countenance, wreathed in smiles, I judged it to be equally entertaining. When we drew round the tea-table the dialogue became more equally distributed, and pleasantly alternated between grave and gay.

Later in the evening, the graver character certainly predominated. They appeared unaffectedly sorry to leave us; and, for my part, I was surprised to find what an element of friendship and cordiality had sprung up in the acquaintance of a week. We expressed mutual hopes of meeting again somewhere and somehow, though our hopes bore no present prospect of being realized.

The last adieu was spoken—and we heard their retreating steps. I looked at Marian: she seemed serious and sorry. “Well,” said she, brightening as she caught my eye, “they have made the time pass very pleasantly. And now—

‘They have come, they have gone, we have met,
And shall meet perhaps never again.’

But I am sure it must be bed-time, and I am *so tired!*”

The next morning was very flat; but Marian encountered it bravely. She resumed her bathing, which always invigorated her; and, as we settled ourselves on the beach afterwards, she said, laughing, “I think I need not be afraid of any more adventures with crabs.” Mrs. Wright strolled up to us, and chatted, which passed time a little. Afterwards, the lad who sold sand-drawings came limping up, with pleasure and triumph in his face, and, said he—

“ You thought two shillings would be too great a rise, ma’am, but I know’d it wouldn’t! I sold the whole lot on ‘em at two shillings a-piece, and might ha’ got more.”

“ How so, John? Who bought them?”

“ Them two young gen’lemen as walked the sands in jackets—they asked me very pertikler whether you done ‘em all, and when I said yes, they bought ‘em every one.”

“ Well, John, but I didn’t do them all!”

“ All that I had with me, miss, I assure ‘ee; and now I must set to work and do some more!”

"Such tasteless things for them to buy," said Marian, half laughing, as her *protégé* limped off. "However, it shows that people only want a little memento of the place."

"And the person," I could not help slyly adding. She gave me an amused look, and echoed, "And the person."

On our return, we found Mr. Carp had left his card, which we were not particularly surprised at, as Miss Linnet told us he made a point of calling on all the visitors. In the afternoon, we met him on the sands, and bowed. The next day he called again, and found us at home. He chatted like a sensible, well-informed man; but he seemed rather tame after our young civil engineers. This was Wednesday, and Jacintha wrote to say she should be with us on Saturday; so we had something cheerful to look forward to, and really *were* cheerful. Only, we were sensible of a loss.

During the afternoon we were on the sands, when a gentleman walked very briskly up, as if to accost us; and then exclaimed, "I beg your pardon!" turned as red as fire, and walked off. We were both amused, and at the same time could not help pitying him, it was such an evident case of short-sight. Afterwards, we were chatting with Mrs. De—, I mean Mrs. Wright, when the same party passed us, stalking along grimly erect, as much as to say, "there shall be no blunder this time."

"Why, Gregory, what are you about?" cried Mrs. Wright, "don't you know your own sister?" and laughed very merrily.

On which the unfortunate man, redder than ever, turned about, and evidently in a perfect agony of *mauvaise honte*, suffered himself to be presented to us as Mr. Pugh.

We all took a turn together along the esplanade ; and from this time forth we never, by any chance, went out without seeing him, though frequently without *his* seeing *us*. But whenever he did see us, he always attached himself to us as long as he could, talking very fast and very nervously, as if to convince us that he was quite self-possessed. Marian was involuntarily amused at him, even while she pitied him, but it was the pity akin to contempt, and we both found him such a very common-place companion that we shunned him whenever we could.

At length Saturday came ; and, like loving sisters as we were, we tricked out our little lodging with every adornment in our reach, that Jacintha's first impressions might be pleasant. Marian made a pretty white tarletan blind for her window, and filled the little glass in the middle of the pincushion with flowers. She also decorated the parlour chimney-piece with fresh flowers, and persuaded Miss Linnet (who was but too happy to oblige in anything) to remove some horribly ugly yellow leno from a few framed and glazed engravings on the wall, assuring her that she need fear no danger from the flies. When this was done, we fancied ourselves quite smart, especially as we had dressed in our best ; and many were the self-satisfied glances we bestowed on the results of our labours.

Nevertheless, the moment Jacintha looked round her on her arrival, I saw her involuntary thought was, "What a poor little place!" and I felt, that coming from such a large house as our own, it must indeed appear so. Instantly I saw, with *her* eyes, the poor, thin, faded carpet—the shabby couches, the second-rate chairs, the apologies for curtains, the poor little chimney-piece ornaments. It came over me in a flash; but I said nothing, nor did she; for she was in good humour and high spirits, determined to be pleased with everything.

"Well, and so here we are, all together again!" cried she, kissing us affectionately. "How well you both look! As to Marian, she never looked so well in her life! and you, Isabella, have positively a colour, and are growing fat! *I* don't mean to grow fat, I assure you! I am quite large enough already—I thought sea air always thinned people. I mean to inhale as much of it as I can, and to take prodigious long walks quite beyond your powers of attainment. What joy to have a real holiday! The first, so to speak, that we have had all to ourselves—for Christmas, somehow, was no holiday—we won't think of it. There was a blight on the house, then; but there is no blight on it now, Isabella! The credit of the school is restored!—its reputation is getting up, as I thought and said it would! What do you think? We have the promise of three new pupils when the school re-opens!"

"Add two to that!" said I, exultingly, and told her of the little De—pshaw! of Mrs. Wright's little girls.

"Five in all!" cried Marian, rejoicing. "Ten altogether! Oh, what a prospect!"

Jacintha laughed—the happy laugh of well-earned success. "Yes, we have toiled hard," said she, "and now comes the reward. Isabella, I think we must begin to pay Miss Dixon something now. That good creature deserves more than her keep. Fanny Ward—Oh Marian! I had such reiterated loves to bring you from Fanny Ward! Fanny is in ecstasy—she is going to spend the holidays in the Isle of Wight—she will write to you all about it. So, this is my little room, is it? Well, a very nice little room, I'm sure!—not *quite* so large as the room I have left!—(laughing.) What a good thing I only brought one trunk and bonnet-box! When I have found a place for everything and put everything in its place, I shall do very well, I dare say. Hawkins desired her duty to you, Isabella. Now, it's off my mind. I must take the good old soul some little remembrance when I return. Dear me, here is a note for you, Marian, from Fanny—I had forgotten she gave me one after all. And notes for you, Isabella, from Flora and Jessy Duncan. And here are book-markers for you both, from Bessy and Clara; and a sachet from Miss Dixon—rather tasteless, poor thing, but she took a world of pains with it. Here are my German books—I mean to go deep into German, this vacation."

Thus ran on Jacintha, with a light heart, while she unpacked, and Marian and I devoured each word with ineffable affection. We

seemed to have been so long apart, instead of only three weeks!

“And now, everything is straight,” said Jacintha at last, having arranged her dress a little; “I shall do very well for this evening, as we are not likely to be molested with intruders.” And again she laughed gaily.

“Dear me, Jacintha,” said Marian, “we have quite a grand visiting-list! Mrs. De Wright; the Miss De Wrights; Mr. Gregory Pugh, Mrs. De Wright’s brother; the Reverend Eugenius Carp—”

“Amazing!” cried Jacintha. “Why you must know every visitable person in the place, I should think! And a tiny place it is.”

“What fine prawns,” she observed, as we gathered round the tea-table. “And such beautiful raspberries; set out with flowers by Marian, I know! I brought the sugar-tongs and butter-knife, at your request, Isabella, but surely Miss Linnet’s plate-chest is not deficient in such needful articles?”

Plate-chest indeed! thought I, remembering with amusement the little basket lined with green-baize which nightly contained worthy Miss Linnet’s small complement of spoons, and was carefully carried up by her into her bedroom, for fear of “the rogues.”

“What a pity you have not a piano!” said Jacintha, regretfully. “I should so have enjoyed a good practice! We could easily hire one, to be sure; but, after all, I am afraid my voice would be too powerful in this little room—it would go through your head. How do you manage, with only one sitting-room? and

that of the smallest! It must be rather inconvenient."

No: we two had not found it so;—but we three did. Jacintha's person was too large for the little room; or the room was too little for her person. She required more space; fancied the atmosphere soon became close; had an irresistible impulse to be always throwing open the window; (exclaiming "Exit carbon; welcome oxygen!") wanted another table, all to herself; thought there ought to be another sofa. All these dilemmas were noticed in the most good-humoured way; but still, she felt them inconveniences.

Out of doors, her enjoyment was intense. It was delightful to see her inhaling the sea breezes, gazing on the tide coming in, and pacing the firm sands with the dignity of a queen. She enjoyed bathing; she enjoyed going on the sea in a sailing-boat; and she and Marian almost daily partook of this pleasure in company with the sociable Wrights and Mr. Pugh. It was misery to me to go on the sea; I preferred reading, working, and now and then writing to Mary Barnet, at home. Jacintha was immensely diverted at Mr. Pugh, who was for ever walking briskly up to people under the impression that he knew them, and then saying, "I beg your pardon!" She looked upon him as little better than an idiot; but a well-bred one; and, as such, had no objection to his sauntering beside her on the sands, and sometimes accompanying her and Mrs. Wright on long walks of exploration. Mrs. Wright liked Jacintha uncommonly; and Jacintha,

liked *being* liked, and being admired, which she plainly was ; and Mrs. Wright's lodgings boasted a piano, which ours did not, so Jacintha used to go there sometimes, and play and sing, for her own delectation and that of her company. Marian was not fond of this way of spending the morning, nor very fond of the Wrights. The basis of Jacintha's disposition was sociability ; of Marian's, seriousness. Her nerves were not yet quite equal to the loud talking, laughing, and singing at Mrs. Wright's ; and one day, they received a yet greater shock during a boating party, when the boat nearly cap-sized, and was only saved by the wonderful presence of mind of Mr. Pugh. It was so uncommon a trait in him, that Jacintha was continually recurring to it during the evening ; and she declared that, since she certainly seemed to have influence over him she should impress it on him that he *had* presence of mind, in the hopes that he would apply himself to its cultivation.

But, next day, Jacintha's tone greatly changed. On going to Mrs. Wright's to play, sing, talk, and laugh, as usual, she and Mr. Pugh were left alone together for a few minutes at the piano by Mrs. Wright, who was called out of the room ; and Mr. Pugh, availing himself of the opportunity with incredible promptitude, told Jacintha he thought her the most charming woman in the world, and offered her his hand and heart.

Jacintha was excessively annoyed at it. She told him she could not think of such a thing, begged she might hear no more of it, and

hastily quitted the house. She came home in a great flurry, and told us what an impertinent liberty Mr. Pugh had taken. There were no limits to some people's forwardness and assurance! In vain I endeavoured to compose her; she would not be composed; but fumed and chafed, while Marian went into fits of laughter.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Wright called, and sent in word she would be glad to see me alone. So, of course, Jacintha and Marian were obliged to retire to their bedrooms; which they readily did. Mrs. Wright was very warm in her brother's cause: he was not a man easily pleased, and he was so enthralled by Jacintha, that, short as the intimacy had been, she hoped she would relent in his favour. I assured her the case was hopeless. She begged me to intercede. I said I knew it would be of no avail. She was a little hurt; but I allayed her wounded feelings; and when we parted, after a lengthened conference, she assured me with the utmost good humour that she liked us all so much that her only regret was that we should not be more nearly connected.

CHAPTER XXV.

One pities bashful men, who feel the pain
Of fancied scorn, and undeserved disdain;
And bear the marks, upon a blushing face,
Of needless shame, and self-imposed disgrace.

COWPER.

“ **I**F that stupid man has the least sense (which he has not),” cried Jacintha, after an uncomfortable pause, “ he will quit the place in twenty-four hours. But, no ! he will remain here, you will see, and run up to us half-a-dozen times a day, and then turn as red as scarlet, and say, ‘ I beg your pardon ! ’ ”

However, she was mistaken, for Mr. Pugh did leave Fishport in a day or two; and as her intimacy with Mrs. Wright had sustained an irreparable shock, she was thrown on her own resources, and, truth to say, began to find Fishport very flat. In this state of affairs she plunged into German with praiseworthy zeal, and resolved to make a first-rate translation of “ *Hermann und Dorothea* ” in English hexameters before the holidays were over. This kept her in-doors so much that I told her she was deriving no benefit from local advantages, and prayed her to resume her long walks. Also, when Mr. Carp looked in on us again, I asked him if he understood German, and tried to get up a little fellow-

feeling between him and Jacintha on the subject, though she detected my shallow aim directly, and gave me a mischievous look that said, "To no good, Isabella!" as plainly as a look could speak.

Meanwhile, Marian was making a splendid collection of shells and sea-weeds, and reading all she could about them, in which Mr. Carp kindly aided her by lending her two or three nice books.

One evening we were all three on the sands, admiring a beautiful sunset, when Jacintha exclaimed with surprise and joy—

"Why, here come John and Laura!"—adding, in rather a mortified undertone, "What will they think of the poking little hole in which they find us?"

John it was, with Laura beside him: a fine-looking young woman, with high colour and piercing black eyes, but, in spite of all the advantages of dress, not nearly so handsome as Jacintha. However, she still was one whom he might present to us with allowable pride, and we all met with great cordiality. It appeared that they were making a tour along the coast, and had resolved to look in on us. Guessing, however, our limited accommodation for visitors, they had bespoken bedroom, dressing-room, and sitting-room at the "Queen's Head," from Saturday till Monday.

It was a very pleasant meeting. Marian, at a hint from me, flew to give Miss Linnet notice of the addition to our tea-party, and then returned to the beach, where the tide was coming in beautifully, sparkling in the

sun at the roll of each long wave. John beheld it with delight; he called it the finest sea he had ever seen, though Laura inveighed at his forgetfulness of the Channel Islands. We walked all in a row, as people *do* walk sometimes on a fine wide reach of sand; I between John and Laura; Jacintha at Laura's other side, and Marian next to John. The improvement in Marian's looks was delightful to him; he commented on it openly, and also took the opportunity of whispering to me aside that he had never seen Jacintha look more glowing with health and animation.

We did not go in-doors till dusk, and then the small lodgings certainly did feel warm and close; but John placed himself at the open window, never satiated, apparently, with the sea; and quoted poetry to me, while Jacintha and Laura enjoyed a *tête-à-tête*, and Marian busied herself at the tea-table.

The next day we all went to church together twice; but they breakfasted and dined at their inn; drinking tea and supping with us. A boating excursion, comprising all but myself, occupied nearly the whole of the next day: they came home tired, hungry, and merry; and Jacintha rejoicingly told me that she had accepted the kind invitation of John and Laura to accompany them on the remainder of their tour.

I was unfeignedly pleased at this, for I well knew she was tired of Fishport, though she was too good humoured to say so; and I wished her to have a holiday not only in name but in reality.

On Tuesday, then, they all departed, leaving Marian and me once more to take care of one another. And though I had heartily enjoyed their society while it lasted, I must say also I heartily enjoyed the succeeding quiet; for I was never very strong.

Marian's case, however, was different: she was a great many years younger than myself, and on her account I wished that John's invitation had included her. But she assured me she had not wished it, and that quiet was really as acceptable to her as it could be to myself. We returned contentedly, therefore, to our habitual pursuits. Jacintha's short stay with us had manifestly improved Marian's spirits, and she was now as gay and well as ever.

We now stood on the highest pinnacle of Miss Linnet's good opinion. Marian and I had been esteemed all that could be wished; but Jacintha was superb, magnificent, queen-like; and John was such a fine man, and Mrs. Middlemass so charming—"Oh, my dear madam!"—a flourish of the hands expressed the rest.

I had taken an opportunity of anxiously inquiring of John whether he had heard any tidings of my father, or knew where he was. But he replied, with indifference, "No—the old gentleman has taken his own course, and pays his children the compliment of pursuing it out of their sight. He is following his own pleasure, I suppose, and leaves them to theirs."

The day after they left us, however, Jacintha wrote me a hurried line from an inn,

to say John had desired her to cut out the inclosed small passage from a newspaper and forward it to me: adding, "It seems to have been a more respectable connexion than we had supposed. However, I cannot bear to think about it."

The announcement was this:—"At Tours, on the 20th ultimo, Susan, wife of Godfrey Middlemass, Esq., late of Mincing Lane, in the thirty-second year of her age."

"Then they were married, after all!" exclaimed Marian. "Oh, how thankful I am!" And tears rolled down her cheeks.

I shed tears too. "We did him injustice in one thing, at any rate," said I. "But one cannot be sorry for her death, for she was a very disreputable companion for him." In fact, she had been our—cook!

"He will feel very lonely now," said Marian. "I wonder whether he will come back."

"Oh, no! He cannot. He dares not. He cannot answer his liabilities."

"Should you like him to return?"

"I should like it, and yet dread it. He has an immortal soul."

"And who will care for it if his own daughters do not? How kind he used to be to us when we were children! How he once loved mamma! Don't you remember how he cried at her funeral? His heart must be softened now. Dear Isabella, don't you think you might write him one of your nice letters?"

"Yes, I think I might write, now we know where he is. Perhaps his having the an-

nouncement inserted was in order that we might do so."

"And John will not, I am sure. So *do* write! And let me put in a little postscript."

I wrote, and she added the postscript. It was late when the letter was finished; at least, too late for the evening post, which went out at seven. We were talking the subject over, seriously and sadly, when we heard a brisk knock at the door. Marian changed colour, and my heart beat violently.

"Can it be he?" said she. "Yet, no. Hearken!"

We listened intently. Miss Linnet opened the house-door.

"Dear sir!" we heard her say, "is it you? I am sure I am very glad to see you."

Something was answered indistinctly in a man's voice, to which she returned—

"Oh, no, sir, not at all! I am sure they will be happy to see you. Pray walk in!"

"Mr. Duncan!" said Marian, softly, with a quick look at me, and flushing brightly.

Mr. Duncan it was. In he came, looking but half-assured of being welcome, in spite of the officious smiles of Miss Linnet, as she ushered him in.

"Mr. Duncan, ladies—though I'm sure I need not have announced him, for you must have heard his voice in the hall" (passage, she might have called it). "Tea shall be served directly," and she hastened out.

"Why, you quite surprise me!" said I, smiling, and extending my hand.

"I almost surprise myself," said he, laugh-

ing with embarrassment. "It seems so odd to be here again. I hardly knew how you would take it. Not amiss, I hope?" with a deprecating look towards Marian.

"How can we?" said Marian, simply.

"How, indeed!" rejoined I. "For my part, I am very glad to see you. And where is your lively friend?"

"In my cottage, near a wood," replied Mr. Duncan, taking up the old tone with alacrity. "Fact, I assure you. I *have* a cottage at the viaduct, built on the tea-caddy plan. Parallelogram outside, two compartments within—for bed and board. Meals sent from the railway-hotel, over the way. Barley-wood in the distance. So there he is, Jack in the box, and this time, I'm the Shadowless Man."

"Instead of 'the dog and his shadow,'" said I, laughing at the old joke. "How came two such inseparables to find they can exist apart?"

"Abstruse study, Miss Middlemass, has for a time divided the shadow from the dog: no idle dog, I promise you. Jack is constructing an improved dynamometer; but Jack talks too much unless he is *solus*, and so he frankly gave me a hint he would rather be monarch of all he surveyed till the achievement was completed; and, as I was hammering at the quicksand difficulty, and wanted to be on the sea-shore, I bade him adieu for awhile, promising hereafter to meet him by moonlight alone—pshaw! meet him at Philippi. This is one of the mischiefs of a couple of schoolboys

keeping together after they are schoolboys no longer. They keep on fooling each other to the top of their bent, leap-frogging through daily life, till all the world believes them to be schoolboys still. So that I really am glad to be away from Jack for awhile, to show you, Miss Middlemass, how rational I can be when left to myself."

"Take care you do not make us regret Mr. Jekyl every time we see you," said Marian, alertly. "That may be the case, if quicksands and dynamometers are your only subjects."

"Then I can resume the old style as easily as put on my hat," said Mr. Duncan. "I know it is not polite to talk of business before ladies; only, I think it a compliment to them, too, not to confine one's talk to mere chat when really interesting matters are in hand."

"Certainly," said I, "and I wonder at Marian's want of sense in seeming to think otherwise, for I know she does not do so in reality. I can only say, that I shall think all the better of you for being seriously engaged in your professional studies."

"Instead of tying crabs on to young ladies' back hair. Oh, Miss Middlemass, how that has weighed on my conscience. I—I, was the culprit! Alone I did it! Jack, like a Pylades as he is, would not betray me (though he continually threatened to do so—kept me in perfect thraldom about it). And I, like a coward as I was, thought you would never speak to me again if I owned it—and that was a punishment I could not face. So I slunk about like a cat that has stolen cream,

but, oh ! my dreams were haunted ! *Say* you forgive me ! ” cried he, suddenly dropping on one knee before Marian.

“ Certainly, certainly,” said she, turning very red, and looking scandalized ; “ pray get up, and say no more about it.”

“ Get up ! I thought you would at least say ‘ arise,’ ” observed he, resuming his seat, just as the maid opened the door, revealing an indistinct view of Miss Linnet in the background, her eyes twinkling with delight at the romantic attitude. That considerate lady chose to ignore our having had tea already, and sent in tea for three—in the best china. There were muffins, too, which we certainly did not owe to the Honourable Mrs. Hum-budgeon.

“ How long,” said I, by way of giving the conversation an improving turn (especially in the hearing of Miss Linnet), “ how long do you expect this quicksand inquiry to last ? ”

Instead of answering my stupid question, he stirred his tea very sapiently, and then said to me, “ A person counting some guineas, being asked how many he had, replied, ‘ If you had as many, and as many more, and half as many, and one quarter as many, you would have two hundred and sixty-four.’ How many had the person who was counting his gold ? ”

“ Who on earth can answer such a question ? ” cried I.

“ Why, it’s the very first example in the rule of Position ! ” cried Mr. Duncan. “ Oh, Miss Middlemass, and do *you* profess to teach the young idea how to shoot ? ”

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“I never learnt the rule,” said I, hardly.

“No,” said Marian, laughing, “Isabella is a shocking accountant—” and she made merry at my expense by relating my blunder at Christmas.

“It was enough to break your sisters’ hearts!” said he to me. “What! All that labour and no reward?”

“Ah, there is always a reward in doing our duty,” said I.

“Which you clearly were not doing, in making that blunder. No, I look upon it as a very grievous affair. Your sisters ought to have put you back into simple addition, and carried you through all the rules. I am afraid arithmetic is a sadly neglected branch of ladies’ education.”

“Marian has been through Euclid,” said I.

“How far?” said he.

“Past the dunce’s bridge,” said Marian.

“And she used to put W. N. C. D. at the end of the demonstrations instead of Q. E. D.,” said I.

“Wherefore?” inquired Mr. Duncan.

“Oh, that was stupid—and rather conceited too,” said Marian, looking rather ashamed. “It stood for ‘Which nobody can deny.’ I should not do so *now*.”

“Because you are wiser *now*, and more humble *now*. Well, I dare say you are both. Wisdom and humility generally go together. There have been women, you know, who have filled professorial chairs.”

“Yes; Lucia de Medrano, at Salamanca; and Francesca de Lebrija, at Alcalá.”

"Did you never hear of the *blue nun*, Maria Gaetana Agnesi?"

"No."

"Well, I chanced to meet with a curious account of her lately. She lived about a hundred years ago, and was one of those remarkable instances which perhaps Italy has supplied more than any other country, of profound acquirements combined with honest humility."

"Those whom I mentioned were Spanish."

"True. But this young lady lived at Milan. President de Brosse was passing through that city, when he was invited to a conversazione for the express purpose of witnessing her extraordinary accomplishments. She was accompanied by her little sister, and surrounded by a circle of about thirty persons. She discussed with them in Latin the causes of the tides, then on the brain, then spoke on optics, on the transparency of bodies, and on curvilinear figures in geometry."

"Dear me," said I, "she must have been much too learned to be agreeable!"

"Well, she feared so herself. After conversing with every foreigner in his own language, she turned to De Brosse, and observed that if the conversation had interested one or two, it had probably tired twenty."

"Academical disquisitions of that kind rarely result in practical good, I should think," said Marian.

"She wrote a treatise on geometry, however, which is not more remarkable for its profundity than for the interesting manner in which it is

written. The venerable Colson learnt Italian for the sole purpose of reading it."

"And why," said I, "did you call this wonderful young lady a blue nun?"

"She had a very affectionate, sensitive heart; and the death of her father so afflicted her that she forsook the world, entered a community of blue nuns, and turned all her thoughts to heaven."

"A true woman's end," said I. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

"Do you admire learned ladies?" inquired Marian, timidly.

"Yes, when their dresses are long enough to hide their blue stockings. They may peep out, now and then, like Mrs. Opie's white satin shoes."

"A woman's mission," said I, "is to be a helper. Nothing can be amiss in her that enables her to appreciate what a sensible man says, and aid him in what he does. Above all, she must wage continual warfare with sin—because, by her, sin entered into the world."

"How wage warfare?"

"By inculcating goodness on the young, the ignorant, and the misled."

"True.—You and your sisters are doing this."

"We are trying to do it."

"Yours is a high mission," said he, after a short pause. "I wish some would think it so who do not."

I longed to know to whom he referred; but he began to talk to Marian of *Echine marinæ*.

He left us in very good time; by which I

mean early. As soon as he was gone, Marian opened her little writing-case, and began to write very fast: sometimes pausing to think, with her hand shading her eyes. I said to her, idly—

“Would you like this review? I have finished it.”

“No, thank you,” she replied, “I am putting down one or two noteworthy things Mr. Duncan said.” And went on writing till bed-time.

It is almost needless to say, that from this evening the intimacy rapidly increased, or that not a day passed without our spending a great portion of it together. I really believe that Mr. Duncan did not deceive us in saying that he was “hammering at the quicksand difficulty”—he was too truthful for that; but I believe that it gradually, nay, very soon, became secondary, and at length absorbed in his far greater interest in Marian. I watched the progress of his increasing attachment with anxiety. I knew his connexions and position to be excellent; his education and disposition, his character and principles appeared everything that could be wished; should I be justified, therefore, in placing unnecessary obstacles to the improvement of an acquaintance with each other’s minds which might colour their whole subsequent lives? I asked Jacintha; she replied, certainly not: and I was very thankful to be absolved by her from the burthen of making myself disagreeable. Only, doubts and misgivings would arise—“whither does it tend? and how will it end?”—which I could not answer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

What if thy heaven be overcast?
The dark appearance will not last;
Expect a brighter sky!
The god that strings the silver bow,
Awakes sometimes the muses too,
And lays his arrows by.

HORACE : *trans. by Cowper.*

ONE morning, we were all three seated on our favourite rock, which Mr. Duncan had dubbed, I know not why, "the rock of reflection," when Marian suddenly said—

"Pray remain here, both of you, while I go to speak to John Frost. I sadly fear he has been saying what is untrue."

And she walked quickly towards him, while yet he was at some distance.

"Light as fairy-foot can fall," muttered Mr. Duncan. A minute afterwards he said, in quite an altered tone, "I am so thankful she is gone!"

I looked round at him in surprise, and saw that he was quite pale.

"Now or never!" exclaimed he; and his colour returned deeply. "I can never see either of you alone, and in a few days I shall see neither of you in any way. Oh, Miss Middlemass, be now and always my friend!"

"Be assured of it," said I, cordially: "I

was very stupid ever to doubt you, and you have now thoroughly secured my esteem."

"What blessed words!" cried he, grasping my hand. "But you know not how I may test it."

I replied, "Esteem that will not bear test, is unworthy of the name. You are young, and may not always be wise; but that will not forfeit mine, so long as you are honest and true."

"And that I am and ever will be—God being my helper!" said he, fervently. "But my way is hedged about with thorns—will you assist me?"

"Certainly, if I can," said I. "It is often a good though a painful thing to have our path hedged in with thorns, because then we have no temptation to swerve right or left, however rugged our footing. Do you not remember that our great adversary's complaint to the Almighty was that He had hedged Job about, so that there was no getting at him to assail him?"

"True—I did not think of that; but the cases, alas, are not similar, because I am within the reach of assault."

"Then triumph over it, by all means, like a brave man; as Job did, when his hedge was removed. We are apt to dwell on his patience (which was what most of us would call very imperfect, after all) to the exclusion of his active virtues—his noble warfare against sin."

"Well, I am afraid there is little analogy between us. But, enough for me that you bear with me and sympathize with me—if you

can. Oh, Miss Middlemass, *what* will you say, when I tell you that I love your sister to distraction?"

"I shall say that young men often say such things, believing in them very sincerely, though I think the expression a foolish one. You mean that you like—nay, love Marian very much. Well, Mr. Duncan, I, for one, believe that she cannot be liked or loved too much,—by those properly under her influence."

"You mean me to infer, gently and kindly as you speak, that I do not legitimately come within the pale of that influence. Well, Miss Middlemass, here is my difficulty—supposing me simply as a disengaged man, 'honest and true,' sufficiently well-born and well-connected, with a small independent property and a profession I love and am making my way in, which may eventually make me rich,—I say, considering all these things, I suppose I might, without undue presumption, offer myself, under fitting circumstances, as a candidate for your sister's favour?"

"I think you might—at least, I see no reason—"

"Why I should not? Oh, there is only one—my father"— He stopped, with a look of grief.

"Your father would not consent?" said I, with a sudden pang.

"I fear so—I am almost certain his prejudices are so strong!"—

"Against governesses and schoolmistresses, you mean," said I, with a deep sense of wounded pride. And then my father's defal-

cations rushed to mind, and I felt that ours was *not* an unsullied name.

He was painfully silent. At length he faltered, "What can be done?"

"Nothing can be done," replied I, decisively, "but to do no more harm. Though *you* have in so short a time, received so deep an impression, it does not therefore follow that you have made one; and you therefore owe it to my sister not to endanger her peace by prolonging an intimacy which can be attended with no good. If you do otherwise, you will be exceedingly selfish."

"Oh, Miss Middlemass, what cutting words!"

"Forgive me, forgive me," said I, with remorse. "It distresses me to pain you, but my sister is naturally first in my thoughts, and I cannot, cannot see her happiness threatened."

"Certainly not—least of all by me; and yet, how *can* I give her up?"

"She would never hear you on the subject, if she thought it were in opposition to your father's wishes. *We*, alas, have a father, and you know not her strong sense of duty to him."

"I know—I understand—I believe—Well, but will you let me speak to her on the subject?"

"Mr. Duncan, how *can* you?—I had hoped better things. Would you make yourself less unhappy by making her more so?"

"Perhaps it might not—Who knows?"

"Who knows," you may certainly say; but I do hope her maiden meditations are yet fancy-free, and the dictates of affection, even of good policy, are in this case the same with those of mere justice. I know nothing of your

father—you know a great deal; and should you be able to overcome his objections, address my sister openly, and no one will rejoice more than I shall at your success. But on other terms, it cannot, must not be."

"Oh, how pleasantly this conversation opened, and how painfully it concludes!"

"Do not believe yourself the only one pained by it!" And he must have seen that my eyes were full of tears.

"What can I do?"

"That need never be a question with any of us. We can always do our duty, and leave the event with God. And, when He sees we do so *unreservedly*, He often clears away difficulties in a way we had neither asked nor thought."

We were speaking so earnestly that it startled us to see Marian standing before us, with wondering eyes.

"You are talking seriously on something," said she, simply; "I will go away."

"No, you need not," said I, trying to rise: but my heart beat so violently that I was obliged to sit still for a few minutes. She sat down beside me. Mr. Duncan, who was on my other side, pulled a *Times* newspaper from his pocket, and spread it out, and tried to appear to read it, but I saw a tear fall on the paper.

"Hallo!" said he, presently, with forced interest, "here's something requires attending to. 'To colleges and gentlemen mechanics. A bargain under peculiar circumstances. A very first-rate hand foot-lathe, by Collier, of Manchester, eight-foot planed bed, eight inch double-geared headstocks,

compound slide-rest, boring collar, fourteen inch three-jawed chuck, and set of drills and tools—all quite new. Just cost seventy pounds, to be sold for fifty pounds. To be seen at Candler's Warehouse, Billiter Street, City.' I must write to my father about this directly; he wants one for my brother Dick." And, starting up and shaking hands with us with far more fervour than the occasion seemed to require, he hurried off.

"How strange!" cried Marian, looking after him in surprise, "he looked as grave as if some great misfortune had happened; and the post is not going out yet. Can you understand it, Isabella?"

"He has been talking of something unpleasant," said I, after a little pause.

"I feared so," said Marian: "I saw it in your countenances as I came up. You were giving him kind advice, I know."

A tear started into my eye as I answered—

"I hope so—I meant it as such."

"Might I ask," said she, hesitating, "what it was?"

I replied, "Better not."

"Well," she sweetly said, "I can trust you. Mr. Duncan may have confidences to repose in you, who are so much older, that he could not trust to me. I am sure he appreciates you, and that he could not have a wiser, kinder adviser."

"Ah," I said, "I am not sure of that! You will, at any rate, be glad to know that he is only perplexed and troubled—he has not done any wrong."

"That is a great comfort," said she, with a deep sigh. "As long as people do not do wrong, all is sure to come right at last."

"So I told him," said I.

"And so I told John Frost," said Marian. "Do you know, I fear he has really been passing off his own handiworks for mine to Mr. Duncan and Mr. Jekyl, and getting a great deal of money from them. It was silly of them to be so deceived, and wrong to pay him so much. However, as he is very sorry and ashamed—at least he seems so—and has promised not to do so again, I have forgiven him, and promised to make one or two more sand-drawings for him in the afternoon, on condition of his always putting his name on his own."

"Ay, that will be a good plan," said I, glad she had something that would occupy her for a few hours. "I shall tell Mr. Duncan," pursued she, as we walked homewards, "that I have found out how he has been raising the market. Yet, no, I will not."

It was a good thing she so decided, for she had not the opportunity afforded her of doing otherwise. Soon after our early dinner, a note from Mr. Duncan was put into my hand. It ran thus:—

"DEAR MISS MIDDLEMASS,

"I am off to London about this lathe. I fancy close inspection is necessary before I can rely on its satisfying my father. Should you and Miss Marian have left Fishport ere I return to it, I can only say that my loss will

be much greater than words can easily express. Meanwhile, with my best compliments to her, and excuses for so hastily running away, believe me,

“Faithfully yours,
“FRANCIS DUNCAN.”

How I thanked him in my heart for such commonplace! Nothing could be simpler than to pass it on to Marian, whom it quite satisfied, though she looked much grieved.

“I wonder,” said she, after a pause, “whether he *will* return before we go. Only three days left! But surely this affair of the lathe need not take him more than twenty-four hours.”

“If he finds it necessary to see his father about it,” said I, “he will hardly be back in three days.”

“I am no judge of the importance of the matter, but if he does find it necessary to do so, it strikes me that he must be very anxious to please his father.”

“He *is* very anxious to please his father.”

“A good son must be likely to be good in all other respects, I think,” said Marian, wistfully.

“There can be no better presumptive evidence of goodness.”

This seemed to please her, and she set about her sand-drawings very diligently, but had not made much progress when Mr. Carp brought his sister to call on us.

They were pleasant, friendly people, though they seemed rather flat after Mr. Duncan. They asked us to drink tea with them, which I

accepted with alacrity, without referring to Marian; for somehow I shrank from a *tête-à-tête* with her, and from solitude: I could not get that frank-hearted young man's sad face out of my memory. The Carps were only a few doors off, so that it was the easiest thing in the world to step in to them, and to step home again. Like ourselves, they were in lodgings; but, unlike ourselves, they were likely to occupy them permanently, and therefore they had collected many little home-comforts and elegancies about them—a piano, a davenport, a globe of gold fish, flower-stands, book-stands, &c.

Miss Carp asked Marian to play and sing; and when Marian asked *her*, she played "Robin Adair." Marian could not resist giving me a comic look; but I believe we were both, in our hearts, more ready to cry than laugh. It seemed as if suggestive ballads were to be the order of the night; for the brother and sister afterwards sang the old air of "Jess Macfarlane."

"When first she came to town,
We called her Jess Macfarlane,
But now she's come and gone,
We call her 'wandering darling!'
O this love, this love!
Of this love I'm weary,
Sleep I can get none
For thinking of my deary!"

Sleep I could get none that night for the tune running in my head. And, as I could not sleep, I lay thinking of all sorts of uncomfortable things: wondering whether I had

done wrong; wondering how much Marian cared about Mr. Duncan; wondering whether he would broach the subject to his father—would ever obtain his consent—would write to either of us—would succeed in forgetting Marian, &c. &c.

The next morning we were not cheerful. That was no reason, however, Marian thought, for neglecting kindnesses; so she finished crocheting a pair of watch-pockets for Miss Linnet, and a collar for her sister, and mounted her sand-drawings, and carried them with her when we went down to the beach. John Frost limping up very fast towards us, and grinning uncouthly, like a poor half-witted fellow as he was, said, pointing to the “rock of reflection,” “That 'ere gemman cut your tombstone afore he left, only he's spelled your name wrong, I knows.”

Marian looked at him in wonder, without asking any questions; nor did she hurry herself in what she was telling him about the prices he must ask. John Frost was hastily limping in advance to show her her epitaph, or whatever it might prove, but, much to his mortification, she said, “No, John, no; you may go—we do not want you now,” and saw him depart.

Then we went, with curiosity sufficiently alert, to our favourite rock-seat; and thereon found neatly engraven:—

“ IN MEMORIAM.”

• We could not help being affected. For a

time we sat side by side in silence ; but a fellow-feeling drew our hearts together, and presently we began to talk with undisguised regret of our lost companion, and to dwell on his numerous good traits. It was evidently a relief to Marian, and therefore I encouraged and prolonged it, till really there was no more to say.

When we arose, and looked once more at the inscription—

“Poor Jack Frost!” said she, “he evidently misread it, ‘I’m Marian,’ and thought ‘the gentleman’ did not know how to spell !”

And, trying to laugh, she had great difficulty to help crying.

I thought to myself, “Lord Duncan beat the Dutch on the 11th of October ; but Francis Duncan, I have reason to hope, conquered himself on the 27th of August ; and, as ‘he that ruleth himself is greater than he that taketh a city,’ *that* will hereafter be to me the date of ‘Duncan’s victory !’ ”

I thought, “What a narrow-minded, proud, cold-hearted, arbitrary curmudgeon old Mr. Duncan must be, to make his son feel he would refuse his consent to marrying an amiable girl whose position is not quite equal to his own !” And then I remembered our own feelings respecting my father’s lowering marriage. But the cases were not parallel. Still it was a stigma that, in the eye of the world, rested on his children.

The day was a saddening one to me, and of anxious expectation to Marian. No one came. I felt sure that nobody *would* come.

I felt sure that Duncan's victory was won by a *coup-de-main*, and I honoured him for it. I knew that Marian was pained; but I knew she must have been pained at any rate, and I thought I had saved her a world of agitation and sorrow.

The next day we packed up and returned home. To the last, Marian was in hopes Mr. Duncan would return, and a tear shone in her eye more than once, but she bore her trial without being peevish or perverse, as some girls would have been. She was sweet-tempered throughout the day; spared me every little trouble and fatigue in her power; had a farewell word and gift for John Frost, many kindnesses for the Misses Linnet, and a pretty present for their awkward little maid.

Of course Miss Linnet was full of regrets to the last: in fact, she shed tears that I believe were of sincere feeling, and her only consolation was in hoping that we might revisit her the following year. "For the clime is evidently congenial to your constitutions," said she; "and though I am past the meridian of life, I would fain hope that I may yet be spared a few fleeting years to enjoy the amenities of social intercourse. The day will come," continued she, as we stood on her threshold, quite ready for the last word, "the day will come, my dear madam,—and, at no distant period,—when" (here she lowered her voice for me alone to hear) "you will be bereft of your charming young companion. It is impossible not to foresee that she will soon or late be enrolled among the votaries of

Hymen. And when that epoch shall arrive, and the happy pair shall resort to some congenial spot, for that period fancifully called the honeymoon, how favoured should I esteem myself were Fishport the spot selected. Suffice it to say, that no inmates would be more welcome at No. 12."

"Thank you, thank you," said I; "and now, once more, good-bye!"

"Be sure to remember my respectful compliments to Miss Jacintha."

"I promise not to forget."

"And should *she*, my dear madam, be the first to lead the way to the altar we were speaking of, be assured I would, with equal pleasure, hail the advent of Miss Jacintha."

"I will tell her so," replied I, unable to help laughing; and we nodded and smiled at one another to the last.



CHAPTER XXVII.

Our portion is not large, indeed,
But then, how little do we need !
For nature's calls are few ;
In this the art of living lies,
To want no more than may suffice,
And make that little do.

COTTON.

JACINTHA, bright with smiles, was already at home to receive us ; and we found everything in such perfect preparation for the re-opening, that there was nothing for us to do but to sit down to our late dinner, and talk over all we had to say, during and after it.

We had little enough to tell, but Jacintha had abundance, and all of a cheerful complexion ; so that it suited Marian and me right well to listen to her flowing details, which we only interspersed with occasional remarks.

Marian was tired, and went to bed early ; and then Jacintha and I had a confidential conference. I told her of what had taken place between Mr. Duncan and me ; painting his perplexity and distress in very vivid colours, but yet rather pluming myself on the dispassionate way in which I had behaved, and the strength of mind with which I had discouraged his addresses.

What was my mortification to find that Jacintha thought I had done quite wrong!—that I had been far too fond of intervention from first to last;—that every man had a right to speak for himself;—and that I had injured Marian in not allowing him to let her hear his sentence from her own lips! We had each a great deal to say upon it: I defended myself, and Jacintha attacked me very warmly; but when, in a fit of desperation, I said, “Well then, shall I tell her *now*?” she unhesitatingly said, “Certainly not! It is now too late. You could give her nothing but pain.” So I wished her good night, and went to bed; thinking she had had more experience in affairs of the heart than I had, though neither had much.

My sisters did not leave their rooms till late the next morning, which gave me the opportunity of revolving the contents of a letter that arrived by the early post while I was yet in bed. I knew the hand at once for Mr. Frank Duncan’s, and I opened and read as follows:—

“*Pendynas House, Aug. 29.*

“**MY DEAR MISS MIDDLEMASS,**

“Shall you be glad, sorry, or unconcerned to hear that the lathe suited my father’s purpose exactly, and has made my brother Richard the happiest of mortals? Meantime, *I*, the author of his bliss, or, at any rate, an important agent in it, am very unhappy, and do not see any immediate hope of being otherwise. What is the good of humming

‘O no! we never mention her,
Her name is never heard,’

when I am thinking of her every hour in the twenty-four? You will say, 'why not speak out, then, now that your father is pleased about the lathe?' Oh, that would go for nothing! So trifling a service, I am constrained to own, did not entitle me to ask for such an enormous return. No—I must bide my time, as the saying is; but I do think that I could have bided it much more comfortably, nay, heroically, had you, my well-meaning friend! permitted something like a conditional engagement to be made between your sister and me. True, she might not have consented—but then, but then! I should have heard it from her own dear lips. She might have rejected me with scorn—but I don't think it! I mean to say, that, had she rejected me, it would have been with kindness;—perhaps even with tears, and they would have been such balm to my heart!

"Well! it can't be helped. You meant all for the best, my dear, good friend, I am sure; and perhaps all *is* for the best;—only I can't see it! You will think me an impertinent fellow for daring to write to you; but it is only for this once, and you owe me a little reparation for having interposed a wall of ice between me and my beloved.

"Really, when I count over the days I have spent in her company (I have made a little calendar of them), it *does* seem sufficiently impudent to suppose she can care one straw for me! However, Jack Jekyl, who is a complete Jack Straw, as easily set in a blaze as a man of straw would be, believes in love at first

sight (on the gentleman's side), and I believe he is in the right on't!

"Now then, for

'Folded hands, downcast eyes,
A sigh, that, piercing, mortifies,—'

or rather, hurra for civil engineering! I'll do something grand! I'll clean the Thames! I'll make a steam balloon! You'll hear of me somehow and somewhere. Love's labour lost.

"My dear kind friend, I have not forgotten your saying to me, 'You have thoroughly secured my esteem—and esteem that will not bear testing is unworthy the name.' You said I should not forfeit yours, as long as I was honest and true. I *will* be honest and true. And now, farewell. Burn this as soon as read, and say nothing to anybody. Your confidants are not mine, and I am a little afraid of Miss Jacintha! Therefore, burn and destroy!

"Faithfully yours,
"FRANCIS DUNCAN."

"Did you see that capital hit in *Punch*? Two young fellows on the beach, gazing at a rock. *First Party* (who is hard hit, and sentimental): 'This is the very spot where I last saw her! I assure you, Frank, she is the loveliest, the most beautiful, the-the-the—' *Second Party* (who has heard the same thing for the last two hours): 'Hum,—ha!—Dare say!—Yes!' No, no, I hope I don't look quite such a goose.

"I can't daub it any longer."

Faithful to his desire, I destroyed the letter, and commenced my usual routine, but in a sadder guise than usual. However, it was too busy a day for sadness: one pupil after another duly arrived; and, by bed-time, the house was full.

Marian was fully alive to the triumph of having regained our complement of pupils. Nay, we had even more candidates than we could receive, and felt our self-complacence much augmented thereby. Miss Dixon was elated by it too, especially as she was now to have a salary. A dancing mistress and drawing master were engaged; and we recommenced our task under the most encouraging auspices.

It may have been fancy—but Marian seemed to me an older, more matured, more serious character than heretofore. She had been a girl among girls; she was their playfellow no longer, though she loved to see *them* play, and never tired of encouraging them to recreation as the reward of diligence. She often smiled, but rarely laughed. I could not help feeling the difference.

Fanny Ward, her shadow, must needs grow more serious too; however, her heart was light enough; there was nothing but satisfaction with her to be expressed.

One evening—(and here I may as well say, that whereas we had at first plumed ourselves on having things vastly superior to schools in general, we now pretty much followed the common rules and customs observed by other establishments. How often we draw our plans on a larger, more liberal scale than we are

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able to fill up!)—One evening, then, while we were enjoying our *tête-à-tête* hour after the girls were gone to bed, and the fatigues of the day were ended, Jacintha, who was reading *The Times*, suddenly exclaimed—“What is the name of your Mr. Duncan’s colliery? Pendynas Bank? There has been an awful occurrence!”

“Oh!” cried Marian and I, simultaneously, in tones of dismay. I added, “Quick! tell us all about it!”

“Last Wednesday,” read Jacintha, “the men employed in the extensive colliery works of Mr. Duncan, of Pendynas, were proceeding to their posts at the usual hour, which is six o’clock, when a man came hastily from the pit, stating that the whole place was full of sulphur, and that all the men below were unquestionably killed. This dreadful intelligence spread rapidly through the neighbourhood, and in about half an hour, between two and three hundred women, chiefly wives and mothers, assembled together at the mouth of the pit, in the most agonizing suspense as to the fate of their husbands and sons. Long before this, however, and within a very short time after the accident, Mr. Francis Duncan, the second son of the respected proprietor, came running from Pendynas House, crying, ‘Who will follow me?’ As the young gentleman is greatly and deservedly beloved, several of the best pitmen immediately stepped forward and volunteered to follow him till death; on which he chose out six, and descended with them into the pit as soon as the foul air had sufficiently cleared off. In a few minutes,

through their arduous exertions, the senseless bodies of fourteen workmen were brought up and laid side by side at the pit's mouth. The agony of the wives and mothers of the unfortunate men may be conceived, but quite baffles description. The deaths had not been caused by any explosion, but by the fatal choke-damp; and the countenances of the victims were undisfigured by the expression of suffering, and appeared as if in peaceful sleep. The origin of this dreadful calamity is at present uncertain, but an inspection of the pit by practical men will doubtless immediately take place."

Tears rolled down my cheeks, while Marian fairly laid her head on her arms, and wept.

"What a spirited young man he must be!" exclaimed Jacintha. "There is no mention of his coming up again."

"I was always sure there was good in him," said Marian, drying her eyes: at which Jacintha and I exchanged glances. "But those poor people—" and she wept afresh.

"They do not appear to have had much suffering," said I.

"What, not the wives and the mothers?" cried Marian. "I was thinking of *them*!"

"True—they are the most to be pitied—as far as we know."

"I suppose," said Jacintha, "old Mr. Duncan is a wealthy, liberal man, who will provide handsomely for them all."

"Wealthy he undoubtedly is," said I, "but I question his being liberal. Indeed I suspect him to be the reverse."

"Oh, Isabella! what *can* you be thinking of?" cried Marian, aggrieved.

"Why, what do *you* know of him?" said Jacintha, quickly.

"A great deal. Mr. Francis Duncan continually spoke to me of his father. He said he loved him very much, though he certainly held him in awe; and that his father grudged nothing that could benefit or aggrandize his children."

"Ah, 'aggrandize!'"—echoed I.

"Yes, I did not like the word, any more than you do, but it was his own. At any rate it showed that his father had what he believed his children's best interests at heart. Isabella heard none of this, nor of a great deal that was worth hearing," added Marian, with a little malice, "because she was always talking and laughing with Mr. Jekyl."

Was there ever such an accusation! *I*, the steadiest of the steady! Really, the best of people do not know what they may be accused of! Not that I mean to call myself one of the best;—far from it.

When a kind friend habitually lends one a newspaper, but now and then intermits it, there is pretty sure to be something in the missing number that one would have liked to see. Thus, on the present occasion, we were all anxious to see the account of the catastrophe, which evidently was hastily written and incomplete, carried on in the report of the next day; and yet that was the first morning since the holidays that *The Times* did not reach us. After waiting for it through-

out the day, I thought I would call on Mrs. Meade, to whose kindness we owed it, instead of sending a message. It was getting towards dusk before I was able to start, and as the walk was, for me, a long one, I took some time about it, and at length reached her house very tired. She was talking earnestly to a gentleman as I entered, and named him to me, but I did not catch the name in the little bustle of our meeting; observing only that he held the missing *Times* in his hand. After a few preliminary observations, I said—

“What an awful accident there has been at Pendynas! Is there any second account?”

“We were just discussing it as you entered,” said Mrs. Meade. “I dare say you would like to hear it—” and her companion, immediately turning to the paragraph, read as follows:—

“An inquest was held yesterday at the Queen’s Head tavern, near the Pendynas colliery works, on the bodies of the unfortunate men who met with sudden and fearful death yesterday in the pit. George Elliott, one of the deputy-overmen, stated that the pit was in good condition when they went down to work. He was coming out of the north headway towards the west drift, when a lad shouted to him to get the men out, as there was a rush of foul air. He called aloud to them, and, at the same time, ran towards the shaft, but met men coming from it, saying, they could not get to it on account of the smoke. Presently something fell from above, and made all dark. A long time passed; he and the men could

hardly breathe—one of them said, ‘there is but a step between us and death;’ and began to pray. Presently another said, ‘hush!’ and they heard some one on the other side of the separation-wall say, ‘where are their tools?’ Witness called out, ‘To your left! make haste, or we shall be gone!’ Presently they heard men using picks, and, after a long time, they saw a speck of light, and then a long stream of it, and then Mr. Frank, down as far as his shoulders, peering in on them. He said, ‘You’ve had a narrow escape—fourteen are dead!’”

There was a great deal more, about “brattices,” and “cap-heads,” “clack-doors” and “onsetters,” that I did not understand or much heed. I only saw before me the gallant young man, “down as far as his shoulders,” with his frank, glowing face peering in on the eager captives. I ejaculated, “Just like what one might have expected!”

“You know him, then?” said the gentleman, in reply.

“A little—we have met at the sea-side.”

“I, too, have met him, but I know less of him from personal knowledge than report. His friend Jekyl I know well.”

“What do you think of him?”

“Of Jekyl? He is an excellent fellow!—sure to distinguish himself. But he says Duncan has the better head and more presence of mind. You see, there were two perils in this instance—first, the foul air, which killed the fourteen men; but, secondly, the fire, which was just bursting out, when

Duncan extinguished it by upsetting into it, with the assistance of his men, a vast heap of rubbish, which, at the same time, immured the other men whom he knew nothing of, and left them in darkness. He was asking for tools for a different purpose, when he heard them cry out for help, and immediately made a clearance for them. Then the other party, killed by the choke-damp, were found and sent up."

Mrs. Meade looked wonderingly at me, and I felt my wits had indeed been strangely wool-gathering, to need all this to be recapitulated. I should be ashamed to relate how many things had flitted across my mind. But the narrator had patience with me, and, seeing me really interested in the matter, went fully into it, and explained every hard word till I quite understood it. Then suddenly saying, "It is later than I thought!" he rose, shook hands with Mrs. Meade, spoke a few words to her on things that in no way concerned me, bowed to me, and was gone.

"Who was that nice person?" said I, when Mrs. Meade resumed her seat.

"Who?" said she, smiling. "Who but Mr. Mortlake! Did not you catch his name?"

No, I had quite missed it! How sorry I was! I seemed to be under a cloud, that day, doing everything that was stupid. How gladly I would have recalled more of his words, looks, and tones! But the light had so faded that he had merely given me the general impression of a good-looking man; his voice I liked, his manner was gentleman-

like, and the sentiments he expressed were to my liking. As I uttered my disappointed negative, Mrs. Meade smilingly rejoined—

“We were talking of you before you came in. It seems he met your sister Jacintha in Guernsey; and he was sufficiently interested in her to listen with deep attention to all I could tell him of your successful school-keeping, and with unaffected concern to my account of your sad trials in the spring. All at once he changed the subject, took up *The Times*, and began, rather abruptly, I thought, to ask me if I had seen the account of the colliery accident.”

After some further conversation, I remembered it was getting late, and took leave, carrying *The Times* with me.

Directly Marian saw it, she seized it with eagerness, her eyes sparkling like diamonds, and she hastily read out the account, and then uttered warm praises.

“Noble—excellent young man!” said she.
“Just like what I thought him!”

I left her to enjoy the paper by herself, and went to Jacintha. As she had accused me of being close in Marian’s case, I resolved to be explicit in her own, and therefore told her I had seen Mr. Mortlake. To my disappointment, I found myself again in a scrape. Her crimsoned cheek and brilliant eye, that lit up at the mere mention of his name, showed me that her interest in him had little diminished; and, catching me by the hand, she begged me faithfully to tell her every word that had passed between us. When she found how

little it amounted to, however, she looked miserably disappointed, and exclaimed with impatience and disgust—

“Is that all? How dreadfully flat! I really thought from your impressive manner that you had something interesting to relate! You are a most unsatisfactory person, Isabella! You never seem to know what to tell, nor what to suppress. For my part, I would rather never have heard the man’s name again, than in that sort of way!”

Here was a blow! To be taxed with my communicativeness!—and to be called “a most unsatisfactory person!” I felt humbled, but aggrieved.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Fast as the periods from his fluent quill.
COWPER.

THE next morning I received a long letter from Mr. Jekyl, dated Cleaveskull-Tunnel Cottage (in my cottage near a wood, I suppose). He said he knew he owed me a hundred thousand apologies for having the audacity to write, but that a man who had tied a crab to a beautiful young lady's long hair, could not be supposed to be very acute in his moral perceptions; and that as I had testified such ("motherly" scratched out, and "sisterly" substituted,) sisterly interest in his friend and himself, even to lending them good books on Sundays, he thought I could not be wholly indifferent to the fate of one of them, who had been recently on the brink of the grave, and was still very ill. He then gave a far more graphic and affecting account of the colliery catastrophe than *The Times* had done, proceeding to relate that Frank, in his personal exertions, had sustained some serious injury, which, at first, made his family very anxious about him, and that he was still invalided and unable to answer his friend's letters. Mr. Jekyl added, "Had his life been sacrificed, I know not how I could have borne the loss;" and then went on to narrate, feelingly enough,

their boyish intimacy ripening with their years. "He was always a brave, noble-hearted fellow," continued he, and he gave two or three traits, which made my heart glow. Then he returned to the calamity at Pendynas, and related how Frank's father had sympathized with the sufferers, and contributed to their support. Some warm expressions of regret, that our short acquaintance had so soon closed, terminated the letter.

I gave it to Marian without hesitation. She read it again and again with eager interest; and, at last, asked permission to copy it, which I willingly accorded. I must say I was abundantly laughed at by Jacintha for having received this letter. She said sober people were the deepest—she had thought me too old for such things; what should I have said to Marian, had the letter been for her; and much more that it is needless to repeat.

Marian and I, however, felt we had a mutual understanding on the subject, and, secure of my sympathy, she spoke of it to me without reserve, expressing her unfeigned interest in Mr. Duncan's character and fate. And then she pursued "the daily round—the common task," just as usual.

I may as well acknowledge that I wrote a few lines of cordial thanks to Mr. Jekyl, and authorized him to present my and Marian's sincere condolences to his friend, when he wrote next.

Time went on: autumn was verging into winter; the days were growing very short, fires were resumed, the muffin-bell again

tinkled in the streets ; the ways were miry and sloppy ; and the girls were talking of Christmas, when I heard again from Mr. Jekyl. "Frank" was better—nay, well ; and was busied in contriving some new preservative against choke-damp, that he hoped might be as useful as Sir Humphrey Davy's safety-lamp. He had been delighted to hear that I and Miss Marian remembered he was in existence, and charged his friend with innumerable assurances of his being our very humblest and most devoted servant. Here this momentous correspondence ceased.

The holidays were close at hand, and we were looking forward to them with sober cheerfulness. The half year had been prosperous, and not more than usually fatiguing. We were making money, and could afford to spend a little in harmless recreation ; but somehow we none of us seemed much inclined to stir from our own fireside, though we received very kind invitations from John and Laura.

"I think it will be very snug to spend this Christmas quite by ourselves," said Jacintha. "What say you?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Marian, "I should like it so much!" And I felt the same. Afterwards I proposed an amendment, which was to invite John and Laura to spend the Christmas week with us ; this would be sociable, and express a sense of kindnesses received. So on this we decided.

The invitation was made and accepted. Breaking-up day came as usual, and, after a great deal of bustle, our young charges scat-

tered right and left. Then came the lull, the repose, the cheerful chat, the calling on favourite friends, and receiving them at home ; the awaiting for John and Laura.

How pleasant it was preparing for that domestic Christmas ! With what satisfaction I selected my groceries, chose my poultry, reviewed my stores, and issued my orders ! With what cheerfulness my sisters adorned our rooms, chose their new dresses, and prepared little gifts for the servants and many an absent friend and poor dependent ! Marian had her own mince-meat jar, and her own stock of warm clothing to dispense to her own particular favourites ; Jacintha gave to fewer, but in a magnificent sort of way that was duly felt. As for me, it was surprising how much I muddled away in little gifts that made no show after all : however, they were intended less for show than use.

The church-bells were ringing a merry peal, when a fly, containing John, Laura, and quantities of luggage, rattled up the drive to our door. Some of the things had to be taken out before they could alight—to wit, a noble turbot and barrel of oysters, a ham, a turkey, not so large as Mary Barnet's, but a fine turkey, nevertheless—and many other things. John looked handsome and cheery ; Laura, all smiles, in the warmest and gayest of winter costume—rich black contrasting with bright crimson linings. It was a pleasant meeting ! We had a very talkative dinner, and yet the viands were freely partaken of too—old family jokes and allusions that had slumbered for

ages were remembered, and brought forth as good as new. Then the carillon players came and received their Christmas-boxes ; then sundry old women for plum-puddings and tea ; then the mummers with St. George and the Dragon ; after which, Jacintha and Marian gave us some of their best singing, and Laura played some lively airs, John and I sitting in state on each side the fire, as though we were the patriarchs of the family. He said aside to me, "Really, this meeting is a cloudless one—save for one sad remembrance." I echoed, "For one!" and sighed.

During the night, we were favoured with the waits ; then came Christmas-day, bright and frosty ; then, on the day following, we all went over early to the Barnets, and John went out with a gun. I don't know whether he fired it or not, but he did not bring home anything. No matter ; our friends had already been too bountiful to us, and our larder was over-stocked.

Thus pleasantly passed the week, and it ended in Marian's returning to town with John and Laura, who were delighted with her, and treated her so pleasantly that she was quite won by them. Jacintha and I, during her month's absence, conducted ourselves like two sober, discreet spinsters as we were, and did a world of work and novel-reading, and had several sober, sociable tea-drinkings at home and abroad, besides dining twice with Mrs. Meade.

Meantime, Marian's letters were full of pleasure ; she had been to the Colosseum, the

Diorama, the Polytechnic, to several picture-galleries and panoramas, to a concert, to the British Museum, and, oh, wonder of wonders ! she had there met Mr. Francis Duncan ! Laura had asked him to dinner—he had come, and the evening had been most delightful : he had told them the most interesting things ! John and Laura were charmed with him—he was coming the next day, to accompany them to the Dulwich Gallery ; he had promised them admission to one or two private collections, and it would be quite a privilege to have him for a cicerone, he talked so beautifully about pictures !

How Jacintha and I laughed ! Jacintha looked on it as a settled thing that an engagement would take place before Marian returned ; but I felt by no means so sure of it. I could not help a little hint or two in my letters, to which Marian replied very lightly and good humouredly, telling me I need not be afraid. Dear creature !

At last the month was ended, and she came back, bright and lovely as ever, and apparently with heart untouched. But she was not of the common sort ; there was no artifice, no guile about Marian, and yet her very simplicity misled. One was apt to think "a girl cannot be in love with one whom she so openly, innocently praises," yet that was by no means a sequitur. She thought of him, and talked of him a great deal ; yet certainly not always—at times he was as completely out of her head as if he had never existed. She had evidently felt he liked her very much, but neither to have heard him say

so, nor to have expected him to say more than he did. They had enjoyed each other's company very much indeed while it lasted ; and when he left London before she did, she was very sorry for it, and that was all. Oh, Marian ! why are there not more like you ?

Ten days had thus passed, and she was uncomplainingly preparing to re-enter on her school duties, when, one morning, the post brought me a letter, evidently foreign, written in a strange, upright hand, mis-spelt, and mis-directed, so that "try" so-and-so, and "try" such-an-one, were endorsed on it by various post-masters, and the wonder was that it ever reached me at all. I opened it with a strange misgiving—it was written in French, and to the effect that if any of Mr. Middlemass's family wished to see him alive, they must repair immediately to the *Boule d'Or* at Tours, where he was labouring under a brain-fever.

I instantly called a family-council. We all shed tears, and each was desirous to hasten to him. But it was promptly decided that only one could be spared ; and I was pronounced too infirm and Marian too young, and in short Jacintha declared herself, and was reluctantly admitted, to be the proper person.

It was just such an emergency as to bring forth all her fine qualities. She thought with clearness and sense, arranged her movements, made her preparations with promptitude and no bustle, controlled her feelings, and, in an incredibly short time was ready to start by the early coach, a place in which had been already secured.



Our cheeks were wet with tears as we fondly kissed her and strained her in our arms. The horn blew loudly, and she was soon rattling down the avenue. What a long day it seemed! The wind was piercingly cold, the sky grey and cheerless, the house empty, its few inmates dejected.

Jacintha was to go to John in the first instance, get him to accompany her if he could and would; and if not, proceed by herself. We thought he would hardly refuse, and it would sensibly diminish the troubles of her long journey.

The following morning we received the comforting intelligence that she had reached town safely, had seen John, had induced him to accompany her, and they were to cross that night. After that, we had a hurried line to announce their safe arrival in France; after that, we did not hear for a good while.

Meantime, the school re-opened, and with heavy hearts we recommenced our duties; sensibly feeling our active, energetic sister's absence, and missing her at every turn. Miss Dixon, however, became increasingly valuable. She was a sterling character, though her parts were deficient.

One evening, Marian was in the school-room with the children, amusing them with some game, and I was sitting disconsolately alone in the twilight, thinking of Jacintha, and picturing "the worst inn's worst room," with my father, delirious, on a squalid bed, when I heard a slight rumour in the street. A chorus of small voices seemed in pursuit of some object, pro-

bably an unlucky dog or cat, which, at length, they appeared to have hunted into our avenue, and to be chasing up to the house. Worried by their noise, I went to the window, and saw a bevy of small urchins jibing and pointing with their fingers at a wretched creature, neither cat nor dog, but a poor, bewildered old man, who, in the dusk seemed to me to be a sort of "silly Billy," such as may generally be found straying about the purlieus of every country town, occasionally molested, as in this instance, by the ill-disposed and mischievous. I cannot endure to see such unfortunate persons baited and derided. I therefore tapped smartly at the window to attract the attention of the boys and send them away, but they were making too much noise themselves to hear mine. I therefore went hastily out into the hall and opened the front door, with the intention of speaking to them; but the instant I unclosed it, the poor victim of persecution rushed up the steps and tottered up to me, murmuring, "Oh, save me! save me!" while the boys, pointing and mocking, shouted, "Silly Billy! silly Billy!" with fits of shrill laughter. It was my father!

Oh, I wonder how I lived! "Begone, all of you!" I fiercely cried, dragging him in, and slamming the door—then, fondling him, "Poor, poor old man! poor father!"

Hawkins was just entering the hall with a light, and seeing and hearing me, stood a moment in speechless amaze, and then hastened forward, white as death, to look him in the face. She knew him directly; but oh! he was so altered!

"Why, Issy, is it you?" murmured he, looking up at me vacantly, "I thought it was!"—and burst into a silly laugh.

"The naughty boys hurt me so!"

I burst into tears.

Hawkins caught him in her arms. "He's too heavy for you, Miss Isabel," said she. (She had not called me by that name for years!) "I'll support him and guide him.—This way, sir," speaking to him in the soothing tones of a nurse to a little child, and gently drawing him towards my sitting-room. He mechanically obeyed her guidance, as a child obeys the nurse.

At that instant, Marian, followed by Fanny Ward, was quickly leaving the school-room, when she saw us, and unable to make out what we were about, came hastily forward. I tried to put her back, fearing the effect of the shock, and said—

"Marian, it's—"

But my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and I became wholly unnerved—unable so much as to put forth my hand. She darted at me a look of alarm, then looked full into my father's face with dismay and terror, saw who it was, and fell to the ground like a stone.

I recollect poor Fanny's irrepressible cry, and her catching her up and ministering to her with strength and address far beyond her years, begging me to be assured she should want for no care, and all would go well, while I tended my father. Weeping, I complied, the instant I saw Marian's eyes unclose: I hurried to him, and found him sunk all along on a sofa, Hawkins loosening his dirty, travel-worn clothes,

and trying to raise his head a little. I slipped my arm under it, and begged her to fetch him a little brandy. We got a teaspoonful of it between his teeth, which seemed to revive him a little, but she told me his feet were stone cold, and very wet; so then I told her to get a footbath of hot water ready for him as soon as possible, and while she was gone I remained kissing and cherishing him. Oh, there is no love like that between child and parent!

Looking round, I was almost startled to see poor Marian, pale as ashes, but quite self-possessed, kneeling at his feet, drawing off his wet stockings, testing the heat of the warm water, and tenderly laving his feet in it. He evidently enjoyed the warmth and refreshment, and his features became less contracted; but there was still a look of helpless fear in his face, and he frequently shuddered all over. I said softly, "Do you know me, dear papa, do you know me?" He looked wistfully at me, but did not say—at length, whispered, "They must not know I am here—you must change my name."

Hawkins darted a look of intelligence at me. "He's right, Miss Isabel," said she. "We must call him by another name,—Mr. Smith, suppose,—or his foes will drag him from us. We must hush up his being here at all as much as we can, and those who *do* know it, must only know him for a sick relation. *I'll* tell the servants, ma'am, with your leave—I know you will not like it."

I mutely nodded, while poor Marian looked pained and humiliated.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Cor. O my dear father!—Restoration, hang
Thy medicine on my lips! and let this kiss
Repair these violent harms!

SHAKSPERE.

I SENT for linen, &c., for my father to Mrs. Meade, whom I knew I could trust; and meanwhile had a little bed made up for him in the small room beyond my sitting-room, which had a chimney and fire-place, though chiefly used for stores. Hawkins, whose wits were all on the alert, soon made the little place quite neat and comfortable, with a clear fire burning in the little grate, and then we got him into it, and exchanged his worn, soiled garments for the fresh linen from Mrs. Meade. When comfortably placed in bed, he drank a large cup of tea with avidity, then laid his head on the pillow, and fell fast asleep.

Marian, who had hovered about us, now stole in again, and after gazing on his withered face, while large tears coursed her cheeks, drew me into the sitting-room, and, saying she had accounted for her absence during the remainder of the evening to Miss Dixon, begged me to tell her all that had happened. When I had related the little there was to tell, “Poor Jacintha!” exclaimed she. “How

alarmed she will be when she finds he is not at Tours ! What will she do?"

"We must write to her," cried I ; "and save to-night's post if possible. Do you write, if you can—I cannot."

Marian's pen flew over the paper, while I rested my aching head against the back of the easy-chair, and wondered how my father had quitted Tours, what had been thought of him on the road, how he had paid his way, how he crossed the Channel, how he found his way to us, and a hundred other things, that would most likely for ever remain a mystery. Even should he recover, the probability was he would remember nothing, or little, of what had occurred while his brain was affected ; and it appeared to me far more likely that he would never rally.

Before Marian finished her letter, I stepped in to him again ; his temples throbbed so wildly, and he appeared so ill, that I desired the servant who took the letter to call at Mr. Herne's, and request him to see me.

When he arrived, I told him the plain case, to which he listened with commiseration, and begged him to keep it quite between ourselves. He assured me, that as far as his own secrecy went, I might depend upon him, but he added that the occurrence would certainly become known, and he even doubted whether it were wise or just to keep it concealed. However, he said, that was our affair, not his. He then went to my father's bedside, and looked very serious when he saw him. On returning to the sitting-room, he told us that he did not believe he

could last long. He might live a few weeks, but was unlikely to recover. For his own sake, we must keep him as quiet as possible.

Hawkins sat up with him that night: I relieved her at five o'clock. The early post brought a letter from Jacintha, written in the greatest alarm, saying that the inn-people had removed my father, only partially recovered, into a poor lodging, where he was neglected, and whence he had escaped no one knew whither, nor seemed to have much cared, till John arrived and made a stir about it. She went on to say, "John and Mr. Mortlake—O Isabella! how strange that we should have met him by the way, travelling by night in the same diligence!" He recognised my voice in the dark, and exclaimed, 'Miss Middlemass! how strange!' John, who was always very friendly with him, you know, was very glad to meet him, and told him our painful errand. He became quite interested in it, and gave us much information about Tours, and about French travelling, and many other things, of which we were sadly ignorant. When we reached the 'Boule d'Or,' he waited to hear the result of our inquiries, and, finding my father was not there, helped us to find the wretched lodging where he—*was not*. He was so much the best French scholar of the three, that he cross-questioned the people much better than we could have done, and took active measures for tracing my poor father, in which we should have been quite at fault. He and John are now pursuing separate tracks, and will, I hope, bring me

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some tidings before long: but do not distress yourselves, my dearest sisters, more than you can help, as they may not come back till the post is gone out."

Poor Jacintha! she little knew that we were in more certainty than herself. How strange her falling in again with Mr. Mortlake! How consoling the course he had adopted towards her!

Meanwhile, there was all the routine of the house to be gone through; and I felt like a guilty thing, when I left my father in charge of Hawkins, and joined the family at prayers, as if nothing had occurred out of the usual course. I fancied some of the children looked at me strangely, and that Miss Dixon was constrained and uncomfortable. Afterwards, I heard one of the children at their play say to another, "I fancied I heard a man's voice in the house during the night;" and her companion returned, "Nonsense! how could that be?" Hawkins told me that one of the under servants had heard some one at the greengrocer's mention that a mad Frenchman had been seen about the streets the previous evening, but appeared to have left the town.

Still, I went through the day like a bird with her head under her wing, that fancies no one can see her. My poor father demanded my continual watching: and when Hawkins or Marian relieved me a little, I placed myself as much in the sight of others as possible, that my long absences might be less apparent.

All in vain! A little girl had been sitting

in the school-room window looking down the poplar avenue, just as my father ran up to the house. She saw him come in, but not go out again; and though the noise her companions were making at blind-man's buff prevented her hearing what was being said in the hall, yet, when Marian and Fanny left the school-room, she caught a glimpse of me and Hawkins supporting him into the sitting-room.

I suppose she picked up things that were said about the house besides; for this little busy-body wrote home to her mamma that a strange man was in the house, and nobody knew. I never could descend to the littleness of reading the children's letters to their parents; consequently, on the third day, the mamma, who was no other than Mrs. De Wright, arrived in the stiffest of silks and the stiffest of manners, to investigate what she termed this mysterious affair.

I silently put into her hand the rough draft of a circular to parents, I was in the act of drawing up, stating that the arrival of a near and dear kinsman, ill and from a foreign land, had necessitated my receiving him; and that though I did not see how it need interfere in the least with the school arrangements, I thought it best candidly to state the fact, that those who thought differently might remove their children if they liked.

Mrs. Wright acknowledged that this was all that could be expected of me; but added that, as the gentleman was ill, there was no knowing what his illness might prove to be, nor how

it might terminate : and that, altogether, the affair appeared so odd, and mysterious, and uncommon, and uncomfortable, that she felt she should be more at ease in taking her little girls away.

I said "certainly," and rang the bell, and desired the Miss Wrights' boxes might be packed, and the Miss Wrights summoned from the school-room. Miss Dixon told me afterwards that they slipped into the school-room again, kissed the girls all round, and whispered to them, "We're going away, because there's a man in the house." Of course, after this, there could be no concealment. I made the best of a bad matter when the De Wrights were gone, by calling the children around me, and saying, "My dears, there is an old gentleman come to stay with me, very nearly related to me, and from whom I received much kindness in my early years. He is very ill, and very much to be pitied : you will be sorry, I am sure, for him and for me."

"That we will," said Fanny Ward, speaking for all, while the faces of the others expressed silent assent, "and we will be as good as we can be, Miss Middlemass, to add as little as possible to your trouble while Miss Jacintha is away."

That model-girl, Fanny ! what a treasure she was ! The gem of the school.

The next morning, we received a sorrowful letter from Jacintha—they were still at fault, and I thought she even feared suicide. Our only consolation was, that by the time we received her letter she would have received ours.

She was too unhappy even to name Mr. Mortlake: he was only comprised in the mono-syllable "they." The same post brought a very sympathising letter from Laura.

"Be consoled," said I, cheerfully, to Marian, as she sighed over Jacintha's sorrow, "they are on their way homeward by this time."

My father had now recovered some degree of consciousness, and he certainly recognised us, but he said very little and in a querulous tone. There appeared to us very little connection in what he said. He seemed puzzled to know where he was, and not to understand or believe our explanations. To our inquiries he was impenetrable.

By chance, Mr. Meade happened to travel part of the way to London with a fellow-passenger, who spoke of having come from town with a singular old gentleman, who seemed English, but spoke French, and seemed very ill. He added, that when they alighted at their journey's end, he proved to have no money about him, and the coachman, believing himself imposed on, became very abusive, on which the other became quite incoherent, and at length ran off. All this came round to me through Mrs. Meade.

We counted the hours that we thought must elapse before Jacintha could return to us. Ere they had expired, I stood in the gloom of twilight at the window, looking along the avenue, and almost seeming again to see my poor father hunted down it. All at once, a post-carriage drove through the gates and up to the door: John sprang from it, then Mr. Mortlake, who

handed out Jacintha, shook her hand warmly, spoke a few words, and then re-entered the carriage and drove off. Even in that moment, it flashed across me that they were engaged; but it was no time to dwell upon it, and the next instant my sister was in my arms.

We both shed tears; John, too, was much affected. "How is he?" he inquired, almost in a whisper. I replied, "He is sleeping—will you come in softly and see him?"

John tiptoed after me, as he had done formerly into Marian's room, and we stood together beside my father's bed. It was almost too dark for him to see him, and yet I feared a light might waken the sleeper. Some trifling noise, however, aroused him: he looked up, and hurriedly cried, "Who's there?"

I softly said, "John."

"John!" cried he: "who is John?" and began to utter strong invectives, that soon became incoherent, and finally exhausted him. All this was trying enough to John, who, having quietly waited till he relapsed again into slumber, stole noiselessly out of the room with me.

"Well," said he, shrugging his shoulders, "the poor old gentleman will never be his own man again, that's clear. What a dance he has led us! And to think of his finding his way here! I can't make out how he managed it."

Nor could we: it was the subject of vain discussion, and then he and Jacintha told of all their weary journey. While refreshments were being prepared, she went up with Marian to lay aside her travelling-dress; and John,

unable to refrain any longer, leant towards me and said in an undertone, with an irrepressible smile—

“The lady is engaged!”

“I guessed as much!” ejaculated I. “How came it all to pass?”

Then John related how Mr. Mortlake had never ceased to think of her; how all that he had heard of her admirable character and conduct from Mrs. Meade had sunk into his heart; how he had been deeply interested in his short interview with me; how he had brooded on these things all the way up to London; how business had summoned him abroad, and he had fallen in with Jacintha and John in the diligence; how their travelling together led to long and communicative conversations; how the affecting object of her journey touched his heart and interested him in her welfare; how the dismay and distress into which she was plunged on discovering that her father was missing, engaged him in offering his best assistance in the pursuit; how each unsuccessful effort and consequent debate what step should be taken next brought them yet more closely together; how her tearful joy at the reception of my tidings overcame him altogether, and how he found opportunity to tell her his happiness was bound up in hers, and received no chilling reply. Leaving his business but half done, he resolved to accompany her safe home, and then return to accomplish it.

All this deeply interesting detail, which I was learning from John, Marian somehow

contrived to hear in the meanwhile from Jacintha ; and when they returned to us with bright but tearful eyes and heightened colours, it was easy to see that we were all pretty much on the same footing with regard to the intelligence. The evening was one of mingled pleasure and pain : my father's case could call forth nothing but compassion and sorrow ; but gleams of cheerfulness continually relieved our sadness when we thought on Jacintha's brightened prospects.

John slept at the "White Hart," but came to us the following morning. My father evidently knew him, but as evidently disliked his presence, and so painfully manifested it, that John withdrew, in compassion for both parties, observing that, as it was plain he could do no good and was not wanted, it would be best for him to return to town, where he really was needed. I asked him if he knew of any ground of complaint my father could have against him. He said, none ; except that he had occasionally written to him for money, which he had never sent. It appeared to me that this sufficiently accounted for it.

John left us ; and Jacintha immediately returned to her school duties. But our trials did not cease : Mrs. Wright had communicated her absurd fears to the mothers of three others of our pupils, who were consequently removed. Thus, five were taken away altogether, and only seven left. The school was again on the decline !

We all felt it ; but Marian the most. Jacintha had all the pleasurable excitement of

her engagement to the man of her heart, and the relief of writing to him ; the consciousness of having acted extremely well in a trying emergency, and of having had due credit for it from her brother, sisters, and Mr. Mortlake. Marian had had no excitement, active exertion, or change of scene ; her prospects had perhaps dimmed, certainly they had not brightened ; her trials and labours had increased, her relaxations diminished ; and a constant care and sorrow stood before her eyes and weighed on her heart.

My father now sat all day in an arm-chair by my sitting-room fire. We troubled ourselves very little who knew of him and who did not. If the tidings of his whereabouts reached his creditors, we could not help it : there was no good in tormenting ourselves about it meantime. Everything seemed cheerless, but we would not despair ; especially as John very handsomely offered to contribute his share towards my father's maintenance, and bade me apply to him in any emergency.

One day I received a letter from Mr. Duncan, or rather an envelope inclosing a letter, and containing only these words :—

“ DEAR MISS MIDDLEMASS,

“ Please give the inclosed to your sister. You really *must*. I can't stand it any longer !

“ Faithfully yours,
“ FRANCIS DUNCAN.”

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It was easy to guess what *it* was. I gave the inclosed letter to Marian. About an hour afterwards she came into my room, put her arm round my neck and wept.

“What can I do?” said she, after a long silence. “It is so pleasant to know he loves me; but he says he fears his father will not consent. And, in that case, Isabella, I suppose I *must* forbid him to think of it.”

“You may,” said I, smiling a little, “but I doubt his ability to comply.”

“Not literally, perhaps,” and she smiled too. I kissed her.

The letter, however, was written, and I know its tenour was dissuasory. But I fancy they were both happier for having spoken.

CHAPTER XXX.

If hindrances obstruct thy way,
Thy magnanimity display,
And let thy strength be seen :
But oh, if fortune fill thy sail,
With more than a propitious gale,
Take half thy canvas in !

COWPER.

WHEN a clever man resolves to do a thing, he generally does it—unless a still cleverer woman resolves he shall not. Now, Mr. Francis Duncan, having obtained a hearing, and an answer from Marian, resolved she should hear him and answer him again ; and thus she was drawn into a correspondence, which I, knowing the parties, believe to have been as harmless as it was interesting to them both. Nay, to him there was doubtless positive good in it ; for who could hold intercourse with Marian, especially when she was musing and praying over every letter she wrote, without being the better for it, and trying to emulate her pure thoughts and high aspirations ? I believe Mr. Duncan emulated both ; and yet found room for plenty of passionate remonstrance and entreaty, plenty of drollery too, which latter Marian did not churlishly keep to herself. I believe that, knowing the sad object constantly before her eyes, he thought he was doing her real service whenever he could elicit

a smile or laugh ; and this he continually did, till my father's increasing illness made him all sympathy and no mirth.

It was a sad Easter. We were glad to have the house to ourselves even for a week ; and John came down, and my father knew him, and they spoke kindly to one another, and John's eyes were moist with tears. Mr. Herne told us that the end could not be far off, and I almost wished it might be while John was with us ; and I suggested to him how well it would be if we could all receive the Lord's Supper round my father's bed, while he was yet conscious and composed. John was startled a little, but assented ; the more readily that I proposed asking Mr. Barnet to officiate. I wrote to him, and he came the following morning ; but my father had become worse during the night, and was seemingly insensible. Mr. Barnet, however, thought he might perhaps catch some portion of the visitation service, which he proceeded to read aloud (the second time in that house), while we all knelt around. When he began the Lord's Prayer, my father, to our surprise and deep gratitude, joined him nearly to the end, and afterwards added to the benediction an emphatic "amen ;" he then seemed indistinctly to murmur, "bless you all," and sank into a stupor, accompanied by stertorous breathing, from which he never awoke. We stood around him in reverent silence till the breathing ceased ; then Mr. Barnet uttered (without book) the collect at the conclusion of the funeral service, in accents so subdued and

touching, that each word distilled healing into our hearts—especially the almost persuasive tone in which he said, “as our *hope* is, this our dear *brother* doth.” John’s eyes rained tears, and Mr. Barnet gently led him away.

“I consider a scene of death,” says John Foster, in his letters to Caroline, “as being to the interested parties who witness it, a kind of *sacrament*, inconceivably solemn, at which they are summoned by the voice of heaven to pledge themselves in vows of irreversible decision. Here, then, Caroline, as at the high altar of eternity, you have been called to pronounce, if I may so express it, the irreversible oath, to keep for ever in view the momentous value of life, and to aim at its worthiest use, its sublimest end.”

Some such purpose, I think, was silently formed by John at this the first death-bed scene he ever witnessed. I have certainly discerned in him since, the elements of a higher, more thoughtful nature. That parent has not lived in vain, who, dying, draws his children closer, not only to himself but to heaven.

The funeral was over, the school reopened, all went on, outwardly, much in the same way, but with a depressed, languid feeling. I sometimes thought when I closed my eyes at night, that I should be very thankful never to open them on this world again. And yet I knew we had unnumbered blessings to be thankful for. But the reaction was great, and I, who had had the most personal attendance on my father, felt it more than my sisters. Friends were

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very kind ; they said we ought to have a change, and we looked forward to it at Mid-summer ; but the interval seemed so long !

At length it came. Jacintha was to pass it with John and Laura, and to make acquaintance with Mr. Mortlake's family. Her prospects were cheerful and even bright ; but she would not accede to his wish of their marriage taking place till twelve months after the funeral. Jacintha was sometimes very quick-feeling ; and she could not bear to cast the shadow of disrespect on the memory of a father whose claims on respect during the latter part of his life had been doubtful. Moreover, she felt for Marian and me, and said it would give us time to look about us and form our plans. For Jacintha had a strong impression that the school could not prosper without her ; and when we told her this was very conceited, she said, "Well, then, without her and Marian ; and she was persuaded Marian would leave me to myself soon or late."

Marian said, "Late, if at all : certainly not soon ;" and I said, "Soon or late, I know I could carry on the school in high style with Miss Dixon for my assistant, *and would*."

Jacintha exclaimed, "Miss Dixon, indeed !" curling her lip. "Pretty school-keeping between you two !" but Marian eagerly interposed, "Oh, indeed, Jacintha, you never do poor Miss Dixon justice. There is a great deal of reliance to be placed in her, and she is thorough mistress of the routine, and her heart is quite in the concern. I am training her with the express view of her becoming

Isabella's right hand, and I am sure they will get on very well together. But, if not, Isabella shall live with you and me when we have houses of our own."

"Yes, unquestionably," said Jacintha, giving me a cordial kiss. But I said, "No, no; married couples are much better left to themselves. You shall never have an old maiden sister stuck up beside your hearth, except on a visit."

"Old, indeed!" repeated Jacintha. "Why, Isabella, you are but thirty-six, and if you would not wear that horrid crape shawl and call yourself old, people would not think you so. Mr. Mortlake was quite surprised to find you set up for an old maid; he said you had not the least pretension to it, and it was very conceited of you."

"Conceited!" I repeated, bridling.

"Yes, conceited," returned Jacintha, "for it is always conceited to try to appear what we are not."

"Well, there is plenty of time to settle the question," said Marian, cheerfully, "for I am not going to forsake Poplar House yet, I can tell you."

Marian and I were engaged to spend the beginning of the holidays at Mr. Barnet's, and then to give a fortnight to Fishport, where I had very little doubt that Mr. Francis Duncan would, very much to his surprise! find us out. However, this arrangement did not take place. We were spending our time very happily at Mr. Barnet's, when Marian received a pressing invitation from *our* Mrs. Duncan, to visit her

at Weymouth : and as we well knew that Mrs. Duncan was fully aware of her cousin Frank's attachment, and heartily sympathised with him in it, Marian's eyes brightened at the thought of being domesticated with a branch of his family, and she wistfully asked me if I should very much mind giving up our Fishport visit. I said—

“Not in the least! I cannot be happier than I am here. I have thoroughly congenial companions, in a pleasant house and charming neighbourhood, and, if anything else be wanting, I shall find it in the knowledge that you and Jacintha are equally happy. Besides, I have something I want to write about, when I have a good deal of leisure, which never occurs ; so go by all means, my darling girl, with a light heart and clear conscience, and make yourself as many friends among the Duncans as you possibly can.”

“I shall certainly *try*,” said she, with a glowing look. “There will be no harm in it, will there?”

“Surely not. No harm, but much good.”

“Well, I think so too. Dear Frank has shown such patience and forbearance, that if I can, by fair open means, smooth his path at all, I owe it to him—and the duty will be a pleasure,” added she, laughing.

“Do you think any of his own family are likely to visit Weymouth?”

“Who can tell? Perhaps they may ; I hope they will!”

So did I ; for, in my opinion, to know Marian was to love her.

She looked so simple and elegant in her new and deep mourning—not

“With nip and snip, and cut and slish and slash,
Like to a censer in a barber’s shop”

(I hate such fripperies as much as Petruchio could do—especially in mourning), but graceful in its plainness—that even Mr. Barnet could not help commenting on her appearance with almost fatherly partiality; and a few minutes were spent in her praises, after we had returned her parting smile, that were very dear to a sister’s heart.

After she was gone, I said to Mary with a knowing look, “Now, Mary, I am going to be tremendously busy in my own room!” And Mary archly replied, “I am very glad to hear it, dear Miss Middlemass, for I am going to be equally busy with the clothing club.” As for Mr. Barnet, he was already shut up in his study; so I repaired to my room, settled myself at my little davenport, placed a quire of Bath post paper before me, and with extreme complacence, prepared to write. What about?

It had entered into my wise head, that as Marian had been so well remunerated for her little magazine story, a much more lengthy work might produce a proportionably important consideration; and that nothing was wanting to my concoction of such a work, but leisure.

I quite forgot that Marian had genius and that I had not: that her new ideas bubbled up from an inexhaustible source, and that her pen

therefore readily gave them a local habitation and a name ; while mine were like a few drops of plain water in a jug, that were soon poured forth and exhausted. Consequently I was miserably disappointed to find that, with every appliance at hand, no subject offered itself, and not a word could I say.

I thought, "Nonsense!—Nothing can come of nothing. Everything seems difficult at first, but becomes easier by practice. I will start off with matter-of-fact, and gradually interweave it with fiction ; and then I can afterwards throw aside the beginning, and substitute something suitable in its place. Now then—Chapter I. That's easily written. I will rule a neat line under it. That's done. Now then. Hum!—"

Then it occurred to me that books opened well with dialogue. I had no idea of the market value of such things, but I thought I would take for my first effort, in three volumes, five hundred pounds. *Allons, donc!*

Dear me, how much dialogue my sisters and I talked, and how hard it seemed to write it! I thought I would try to recall one of our real dialogues, and set it down. Then I could alter the names, &c., afterwards. I fell into reverie ; and mused on that eventful evening when we three sat round the fire and revolved the project of the school. I seemed to remember all that had been said.

"That will do!" cried I. And hastily resuming my pen, I wrote "Poplar House Academy" at the top of the page ; and then began with—

“How well I remember that evening !”

Just then the luncheon-bell rang.

No matter. Having fairly started, I felt I could go on, and went down stairs in high glee. Directly luncheon was over, we separated again by mutual consent, and I resumed my entertaining employment. I wrote a whole chapter; and then Mary came and said it was a shame we should stay in-doors any longer, and the pony chair was at the door.

The next day I continued my task, equally to my satisfaction, but it seemed to be assuming a biographical rather than a fictitious character. Never mind ! I was persuaded something would come of it ; and, at any rate, I liked my amusement, and was at full liberty to pursue it. So I wrote, from day to day, till I made considerable progress in this veritable history.

Meantime, Marian wrote to say, “ I played you a trick about Mr. Duncan, the first time I ever saw him, and now he has played me one. All his family were here—that is, in Weymouth—before Mrs. James Duncan invited me; and she did so at his instance, he making the express stipulation that she should not mention their being here, lest you or I should take some alarm, and the invitation should be declined ! Now, we are seeing one another every day. I like Mr. Duncan, senior, very much ; he is not in the least like what I expected him to be, but a frank-hearted, cheerful man, though I can suppose him to be, on occasion, a little choleric. Frank takes care

not to give occasion, and behaves very pleasantly to his father. The two Miss Duncans are very pretty, ladylike, and friendly ; the elder one has a look of mind, and a Spanish kind of face, such as Murillo loved to paint. We are all going on a boating-party presently."

This boating-party ended in a misadventure ; they were out a great many more hours than they intended, on account of a squall coming on, and old Mr. Duncan was very uneasy. Two or three other little adventures and misadventures occurred : in short, something seemed always happening to enliven Marian's letters. I only wished I could make my book half as interesting. But no ! it became more and more of a true history ; and I saw very plainly it would never do to print ; but yet I went on writing.

The holidays ended too soon ! How happy we all three had been, in our several ways ! But yet, we would not linger with our favourite friends to the last, but preferred spending a few days with each other before our labours recommenced. I reached home first ; then Jacintha ; then Marian, looking lovelier than ever.

As soon as she had kissed us, she disengaged a small hamper from her luggage, and brought it to me, laughing.

"There," said she, setting it down at my feet, "there is a present for you, Isabella, from Frank, with his love ; and he hopes you will accept it, for *Auld lang syne*."

"I know what it is!" cried I. "It's a crab!"

"And here," said she, putting a book-parcel into my hand, and kissing me, "is a little keepsake from me, in memory of your kindness in letting me go to Weymouth—'Crabbe's Poems!'"

CHAPTER XXXI.

And all went merry as a marriage bell.

THE field had been won by sheer goodness and honesty. Old Mr. Duncan had seen enough of Marian to like her cordially, and to be content, since his darling Frank declared his happiness was bound up in her, to give his consent. She had returned home engaged, with the full approval and affection of his family; but she, like Jacintha, was resolute not to marry till our term of mourning had expired.

Cheerfully and quickly, therefore, fled the next half-year; and cheerfully and quickly fled the Christmas holidays, when we had a family gathering, including Mr. Mortlake, Mr. Duncan, and—why not? Mr. Jekyl. The Barnets, also, were of the party; and I thought Mr. Jekyl seemed a good deal pleased with Mary.

Poor Fanny Ward had had a tearful parting with us. She had now shot up surprisingly, tall, and looking older than she was; and her parents thought her old enough to leave school. But Fanny begged hard for another half-year; and her parents, finding that Marian would be unlikely to be at Poplar House beyond that term, readily consented.

Fanny, therefore, was on the alert, to learn

all she could of her dear friend before their parting, greatly encouraged thereto by the animating prospect of being Marian's bride-maid, and Marian's future guest. In fact, I thought she fagged too much for her health; but I knew it would not be for long.

*Meadowley Vicarage,
Thursday after Easter.*

And now the double-wedding has taken place! Mr. Barnet himself officiated, and Mary Barnet and Fanny Ward acted as bridemaids. The Miss Mortlakes and the Miss Duncans were included; the "White Hart" had overflowed with guests ever since Saturday, and now all have dispersed!

Jacintha and Mr. Mortlake have gone to Switzerland, where they will proceed to Italy. Mr. Duncan and Marian will join them at Como. John and Laura have returned to town, and I came here yesterday. I have promised my next visit shall be to them.

Meanwhile, Miss Dixon and I shall get on as well as we can till Midsummer. After that, we shall see what we shall see. It is doubtful whether I shall carry on the school—in fact, it is pretty certain I shall give it up to Miss Dixon and a niece of Mrs. Cole's. It will be my own fault if this sweet vicarage is not, thenceforth, my permanent home. We shall see!

THE END.



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